

TALO 2006

The Future of Learning in a Networked World

Photo on cover: <http://flickr.com/photos/teachandlearn/253770471/>

“We aim to produce a book with a DVD by the end of the tour...”

“WOW: by the end of the tour!!! ... Hmm. Yep. It's possible. Lots of power in the laptops & gadgets you guys carry, and I've seen the way you work. :-)”

Editor's note:

Well it wasn't quite by the end of the tour, but it was soon enough.

This is an attempt to provide a non electronic glimpse of some of the discussions and events that took place during the TALO Swap Meet 2006 / Future of Learning in a Networked World (FLNW), New Zealand Tour. FLNW was probably one of the most thoroughly documented education conferences there ever was. Thousands of photos, hundreds of email list postings, hundreds of blog posts, many many videos and many many audio recordings. But sadly many key people, places and ideas were missed. I am sorry to those who are not represented in this book, but rest assured you are present in the minds of all those who took part.

I hope that this printed compilation captures something of FLNW, and inspires more events like it

Many thanks to

Otago Polytechnic	Manukau Institute of Technology
University of Otago	NorthTec
Dunedin College of Education	UniTec
Flexible Learning Leaders in New Zealand	Auckland University of Technology
Tertiary Accord New Zealand	the University of Auckland
The New Zealand Ministry of Education	EON Foundation
eFest	Christchurch College of Education

and the many individuals behind the scenes - without whom this event would not have succeeded.

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All source material used to make this print is available at the following URLs:

<http://flnw.wikispaces.com>

<http://googlegroups.com/group/futureoflearning>

<http://del.icio.us/tag/flnw>

<http://flickr.com/photos/tags/flnw>

http://blip.tv/posts/?topic_name=flnw

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We're using del.icio.us tagging to discover emergent and dominant themes from the captured media. The tag cloud is a type of graphical representation describing logged media from the tour. It presents log words known as tags in varying sizes dependent on how many times a word was use - bigger words represent tags that have the most logged media behind them, smaller words the least. So from that graphic we can tell at a glance what emergent or dominant themes are coming through based on what has been recorded and logged.



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They are a small vociferous minority... Artichoke

http://artichoke.typepad.com/artichoke/2006/09/they_are_a_smal.html

Ah, hello. Well, first of all I'd like to apologize for the behaviour of certain of my colleagues you may have seen earlier, but they are from broken homes, circus families and so on and they are in no way representative of the new modern improved British Navy. They are a small vociferous minority... and may I take this opportunity of emphasizing that there is no cannibalism in the British Navy. Absolutely none, and when I say none, I mean there is a certain amount, more than we are prepared to admit, but all new ratings are warned that if they wake up in the morning and find tooth marks at all anywhere on their bodies, they're to tell me immediately so that I can immediately take every measure to hush the whole thing up. And, finally, necrophilia is *right out*. Vice Admiral Sir John Cunningham Monty Python's Flying Circus 1969

I am taking Arti to Dunedin tomorrow. After a bit of identity dislocation we have resolved our differences and accepted an invitation from Leigh and RoseG to "run away and join the circus".

Otago Polytechnic has initiated a traveling open space conference² called The Future of Learning in a Networked World.

International speakers will come to Dunedin on September 18 to 20, then travel as a roadshow to participating institutions to continue open space meetings with local audiences.

This event coincides with the annual meeting of the Teach and Learn Online network being held in Dunedin on September 18, and eFest being held in Wellington September 27 to 29.

Between these dates the group will travel to Christchurch, Northland, Auckland and end up in Wellington, continuing the discussions, recording, blogging and publishing ideas and models to the wider audience along the way.

It promises to be an unusually fluid (un)conference experience - paradox and uncertainty rule.

Arti' has been studying the "small but vociferous minority" closely and ear-jacking the numerous Vice Admiral Sir John Cunningham like group emails. Once we can figure out what they are all talking about you can expect tales of networked misb(e)haviour, main nav tabbed Web2.0 cannibalism and feed whipped necrophilia straight from the elephant's Suprglu_sawdust.

You'll be exploring the muteness of the void then Arti'?

Comments They are a small vociferous minority

sc

Circus: traditions of inclusiveness, acceptance, personal excellence, pushing the limits, innovation. The circus family spreads the globe- every performer is a member.

They protect and feed each other.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_space_conference

We love the clowns, don't we? The archetypal depressive who lives a lonely existence in their caravan with a bottle- then comes on stage and shines every night.

Full of paradox and uncertainty.

Artichoke

OMG SC, thanks for this - I nearly forgot to throw Arti's bottle into the backpack

RoseG

Dearest quicksilver state of the Arti,

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

From all your fellow travellers here in christchurch

PS Go hug yourself :-)

Artichoke

Hi rose,

Am trying that "Go hug yourself" stuff you recommend, even ordered the t-shirt - but its not working. I miss the eccentricity of the tour party and the uncertainty of the tour conversations

ihug is experiencing massive and eccentric server delays so have been building a pigeon coop to ensure continued connectivity even at that most difficult "ummm..." level of discourse.

Information superhighway carrier pigeon extravaganza

Michael Leunig in "You and Me" Penguin Books 1995

Soon every home will have a pigeon coop; will be connected to the world by pigeons! Pay bills, do shopping and banking; work from home by pigeons!

Just write the message on a cigarette paper, tie it to the pigeons leg and out the window! NOT A PROBLEM!

Pigeons will change everything! Big pigeon revolution! We'll talk to the world by pigeons!

AND WHAT WILL WE SAY WHEN WE TALK TO THE WORLD?

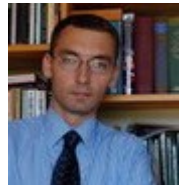
Well we'll say ... we'll say things like ... umm ... we'll say "Hello" and also things like "have a nice day" and ... ummm ..things of that nature.

Some of the participants



Stephen Downes³ - Canada

Stephen is perhaps best known for his daily research newsletter, OLDaily (short for Online Learning Daily), which reaches thousands of readers across Canada and around the world. His work also includes the development of educational content syndication systems such as Edu_RSS and DLORN along and the design of a digital rights management system for learning resources. Stephen is also frequently to be found the road giving seminars and lectures on the field of online learning, including the notable Buntine Oration delivered in Perth, Australia, in October, 2004.



Konrad Glogowski⁴ - Canada

PhD candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. His thesis focuses on the use of blogging communities in education. His blog, Blog of Proximal Development, vocalizes his thoughts on this subject and comments on the impact that blogging and blogging communities are having in education.

³ <http://www.downes.ca/news/OLDaily.htm>

⁴ <http://www.teachandlearn.ca/blog/>



Teemu Leinonen⁵ - Finland

Teemu Leinonen holds over a decade of experience in the field of research and development of web-based learning. His areas of interest and expertise covers design for learning, computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL), online cooperation, learning software design, educational planning and educational politics. Since 1998 Teemu has led Learning Environments research group of the Media Lab, University of Art and Design Helsinki. The research group has coordinated research and development projects, funded by The European Commission in the Information Society Technologies (IST) framework, the National Technology Agency of Finland (TEKES), the Nordic Council of Ministers and the UNESCO. Selected projects: MobilED audio wiki; LeMill - Do it yourself learning resource repository; Fle3 Learning environment for collaborative knowledge building and jamming; UNESCO YDC - Young Digital Creators Educators' KIT.



Barbara Dieu⁶ - Brazil

Bee is an EFL teacher and coordinator of the Foreign Language Dept at the Franco-Brazilian school in Sao Paulo. She has organized and managed a number of international projects online involving different schools and institutions worldwide. She is also Coordinator of the Braz-Tesol EduTech SIG, member of Tesol TAC (Technology Advisory Committee) and belongs to many national and international communities of practice like Webheads in Action, Cyberlangues, Vivência Pedagógica and CIO's em Educação. Her most recent collaboration is Dekita.org, a community of people dedicated to promoting open communication in language learning.

⁵ <http://www.uiah.fi/%7Etleinonen>

⁶ http://members.tripod.com/the_english_dept/bee.html



Michael Coghlan⁷ - Australia

Michael Coghlan works as an online facilitator for TAFE in South Australia, and the eLearning Networks of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework. His background is in English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching, and he began teaching online in 1997. A founding member of the Webheads community, Michael has presented at many national and international conferences, and is a skilled MVP (Multiple Venue Presentation) facilitator – presenting to face to face and online audiences simultaneously. His particular interests are webcasting, the use of web-based voice technologies, social software/networked learning, and the impact of the Internet on education and society.



Steven Parker⁸ - Australia

Steven Parker works for the Teaching and Learning Resource Unit at the Wollongong Campus of TAFE NSW, Australia. He is an Irish/Australian passionate about network learning, web2.0 and working with and fostering the creativity of students to create and share their own resources, achieve their learning outcomes and form their own personal learning networks. He is currently helping to build online communities and networks of teachers and learners from various trades and occupations. Steven has so far built a Tourism and Hospitality Education Network which supports teachers and trainers in that field to learn and employ Web2.0 technologies in their practice.

7 <http://users.chariot.net.au/%7Emichaelc/pd/TELLS.htm>

8 <http://networklearning.blogspot.com/>



Leigh Blackall⁹ - New Zealand

Leigh Blackall works for the Otago Polytechnic in Educational Development. He has helped organise this conference and will be tagging, blogging and podcasting along to make sure everyone stays rowdy and stirs up trouble. Leigh is known in the group for his blog Teach and Learn Online and his work developing various resources to help people understand and use more of the socially networked Internet. An advocate for networked learning, holistic learning, life based learning and deschooling, Leigh looks to ways of incorporating more of life's everyday experiences into educational practices - or is it the other way round?



Rose G¹⁰ - Australia

Rose has broad experience in the areas of professional development and flexible learning including stints as training manager at OTEN, project officer with Learnscope and project manager of the Australian Flexible Learning Community. She is currently consulting as a learning and development specialist to the University of Ballarat and has been an enthusiastic member of TALO eGroup since its inception.

⁹ <http://leighblackall.wikispaces.com/>

¹⁰ <http://lastoneblogging.blogspot.com/>



Jo Kay¹¹ - Australia

Jo works in Educational Technology, providing technical support, professional development and elearning resource development services at the Teaching and Learning Resource Unit, TAFE NSW - Illawarra Institute. Her interests include network learning, online education, web culture, digital arts, identity and performance arts. Jo's current research focus is on Web 2.0, Mobile Learning and Virtual worlds and the possibilities these new technologies offer to us all. Check out Jo's blog or virtual worlds explorations for more info on her work.



Sean FitzGerald¹² - Australia

Sean is an independent researcher, consultant and presenter with a passion for emerging technologies and their impact upon society. In recent years his professional focus has been on Web 2.0 technologies and social software and their impact on teaching and learning. He has been involved with many LearnScope and E-learning Networks projects for the Australian Flexible Learning Network supporting educators experimenting with emerging tools and learning models. His current interest is in exploring the potential and impact of 3D virtual worlds, and has been lately spending way too much time and having way too much fun in Second Life! Sean is also co-presenter of the Casting the Net Podcast

¹¹ <http://jstuffed.blogspot.com/>

¹² <http://seanfitz.wikispaces.com/>



Alex Hayes¹³ - Australia

Alex works with the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, NSW Learnscope Team (Sydney) as a Project Officer. Alex has a varied and extensive education background (Justice, Welfare, [Dis]Abilities) mixed with an array of artistic pursuits incorporating new and emergent technologies. As a m-learning advocate, Alex moblogs his way through life mixing lo-fi conversations, flexible learning co-ordination and associated past-times with research and applied application of social softwares for educational re-purposing. Between times Alex unravels the Australian VTE scene with Stephan Ridgway and composes mixed-leet-poetics for international settings.



John Eyles¹⁴ - New Zealand

Artist, educator and businessman. John has 10 years elearning experience and knows how to harness the creative potential of dispersed groups through digital media across the globe. He has experienced business startups and venture funding, overseas development and working in large institutions in the UK, Europe, SE Asia, Japan and South Pacific. He is a Senior Lecturer in Postgraduate Art and Design, and an expert in English Language Learning. He is digitally, word and visually literate. He is an ideas person, a jigsaw dreamer who follows through with action.

¹³ <http://alexanderhayes.wikispaces.com/>

¹⁴ <http://www.johneyles.info/>



Bronwyn Hegarty¹⁵ - New Zealand

Bronwyn has been assisting Leigh to organise the event, in particular the Dunedin leg and funding. Her claim to fame is that she taught herself to use a computer on an Apple Classic way back in 1987, was in the first wave of eLearners at OP, and one of the recipients of a Flexible Learning Leader in New Zealand (FLLinNZ) award. Bronwyn now works with Leigh Blackall and Terry Marler as a developer in the Otago Polytechnic Educational Development Centre. Two projects have kept her busy recently: online information literacy modules, and self-efficacy and staff development in eLearning. Bronwyn is currently exploring the use of reflective strategies in teacher education as part of a Doctorate.



Dawn Coburn - New Zealand

Dawn is a teacher who returned to live in Dunedin seven years ago. In her spare time you will often find her swinging a racquet on a badminton or tennis court. Dawn has various ICT roles at Dunedin College of Education as well as teaching curriculum Technology. She has taught and learned online for many years. Resource creation is a long standing interest. At present Dawn is involved with Bronwyn and others in the development of online learning modules for Information Literacy. Her current doctoral study "Gone Tomorrow?" addresses questions of transmission of culture and identity in relation to artefacts, such as photographs; with especial attention being given to the consequences of technological obsolescence, one child (or no child) families and digitisation.

¹⁵ <http://bahtings.blogspot.com/>



Marg O'Connell¹⁶ - Australia

Marg works as an educational designer at the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT), ACT. She is a member of the Flexible Learning Solutions team (FLS) who support teachers in their development of electronic learning and teaching. Marg hails from West Australia and has worked in tertiary and community education sectors, as well as TAFE. She was a Flexible Learning Leader in 2002. Marg keeps numerous blogs and uses wikis as part of her work with teachers and staff development, and facilitates the CIT Online Teacher Network (OTN). Marg is currently studying a Master of Education, looking into the field of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) research, its impact on the sector and on VTE teachers, and asking can social software enable a 'democratisation' of VTE research in an everchanging networked world?



Mark Northover - AUT University

Mark has been involved in the support of flexible and e-learning for about ten years, and is currently manager of FL services at AUT. He has been a frequent contributor at ASCILITE conferences, and was a FLLinNZ member of the second cohort. He is currently most interested in providing FL systems and opportunities that support teaching staff (with varying degrees of IT literacy) and encourage student collaboration. Mark is helping to organise the Auckland event, which will be held at the AUT city campus on Monday September 25.

¹⁶ <http://margoconnell.wikispaces.com/>



Stanley Frielick¹⁷ - New Zealand

Stanley is Director of Flexible Learning at NorthTec (and is also manager of the Flexible Learning Leaders in NZ (FLLinNZ) project for 2006-07). He's been at NorthTec for two years - helping to build (from scratch) an infrastructure and development process for flexible and distributed learning across the Northland region. Previously he was at the Centre for Professional Development at the University of Auckland where he completed a PhD and coordinated the Teaching Learning Research programme. He is originally from South Africa where he had an eclectic career - lecturer in academic development, lecturer in African and Comparative Literature, and English teacher in secondary schools. Stanley has wide-ranging research interests in (d)e-learning, ecological approaches to teaching/learning, complexity science, and higher education theory. He is organising the Northland leg of the tour and the FLLinNZ meeting with the FLNW group at eFest.



Russell Butson¹⁸ - New Zealand

Russell is a lecturer in higher education at the University of Otago. His background includes teaching and learning across mixed ages in private and public schools, community based training and higher education. He is particularly interested in more engaging, collaborative learning experiences that are consistent with the idealism, imagination and expectations of learners within higher education. This requires scrutiny of the nature of the mechanisms that have formed our educational system, and examination of whether or not there is another angle to the story or another way to address education.

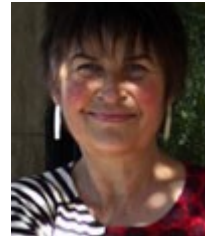
¹⁷ <http://www.flexilearn.com/>

¹⁸ <http://russellbutson.wikispaces.com/>



Artichoke¹⁹ - New Zealand

Artichoke is an edublogger, and Pam is a teacher. Arti' works on laughter and irreverent conversation with imaginary friends, and suffers from a stuck bold key. Pam works as a teaching and learning consultant with schools and teachers across New Zealand on curriculum alignment, ict and thinking. Arti' and Pam were only persuaded to join the tour in Dunedin when RoseG described it as "running away to join the circus".



Anne Elliot - New Zealand

Breaking with apparent tradition, I will use my own voice. I am a doctoral candidate at Massey and this semester also teaching a Internet-based paper about Internet-based learning at the Faculty of Education at Otago, doing both from my home in Middlemarch - approximately where Wednesday's train trip ends. I am a primary teacher, have worked in teacher education and in educational research on ICT. My doctoral thesis investigates the experiences with ICT by New Zealand beginning teachers, a topic about which there is a dearth of information. Although easily swayed by "cool" technologies, I attempt to maintain a critical perspective on ICT in education - a dissident voice in the celebratory discourse.

¹⁹ <http://www.artichoke.typepad.com/>



Glen Davies²⁰ - New Zealand

Hoping to catch up with the circus on Thursday when they hit Chirstchurch, I will follow Anne - always feel uncomfortable talking about myself in the third person. I have been involved in online learning application development at the Christchurch College of Education for the past 6 or 7 years - mainly on Interact, but various other projects as well ... My pet hate is making students upload pointless asssignments to locked LMS class sites that get zipped up and archived when the course has finished and a grade has been assigned - if that isn't a stupid and pointless use of the web I don't know what is ;-)



Brent Simpson²¹ - Waiheke/Auckland

I am currently an interface/interaction designer on the eXe Project an Open Source authoring tool for eLearning. I live on Waiheke Island so will catch up with this contemporary 'dog and pony show' over there. I have been entwining myself in the intersections of learning and technology for over 10 years now. I was an early instigator of Open Content having released the Texas Information Literacy Tutorial (TILT) under Wiley's Open Publication License (before there was a CC). TILT has been modified and installed in 100 institutions worldwide and translated into 4 languages.

20 <http://glen.interactlms.org/>

21 <http://pedagogyofthecompressed.blogspot.com/>

Open Space – where we may be going wrong - Leigh Blackall

<http://learningnetworkedworld.blogspot.com/2006/09/where-we-may-be-going-wrong.html>

Imagine fronting up to your standard event coordinator and asking them to organise an open space conference²²? They might respond with, "I understood the conference bit..."

When you consider that everything that is traditionally involved in coordinating such an event; funding, promotions and publicity, printed fliers, participation.. it is all geared towards the standard conference - being key note speakers, sponsorship, lectures, workshops and booths.

So when a couple of deep south educational developers decide to sniff out interest and organise an open space conference in multiple locations across New Zealand, you might expect that along the way, actually all the way, they'd encounter difficulties in remaining true to open space conference. Those things that are necessary in coordinating and promoting the event each play their part in clawing things back into a standard conference of celebrities, lectures and mute audiences.

It was through a rather important if brief exchange I had with Derek Chirside yesterday that I came to realise this with more clarity. Derek has instinctively understood the intent and direction of this conference, and so it was through discussing with him the difficulties of organising and promoting this event that I began to realise the shape of the problem, and felt the need to reaffirm the objective of this event.

The objective of this event is to initiate and strengthen new connections and thereby changes in the New Zealand education sector. The key to meeting this objective is through open participation.

To some extent that objective is already being met. The new connections and discussions currently taking place both locally and internationally is encouraging, something a face to face meeting will help to strengthen.

We have invited several people from other regions of the world to take part. This is to bring wider perspectives and connections into the open space conference. It is important that their involvement is complimentary to local New Zealand participation, and it is here that I realise we risk affecting the open space most of all.

Due to the complexity of coordinating the international participation in this event it is easy to see how it dominates the preparations and possibly overshadows the overall event. Our guests are here to see New Zealand, some for the first time, to hear about and see our work, to show us their work, and to join in a discussion and make new connections. So in the final 2 weeks leading up to the Dunedin meeting we should follow John Eyles lead and add more New Zealand based profiles to the wiki.

I hope by doing this we can start to balance and refocus the event, back to being an exchange of ideas and experiences in as nearer thing to open space conference as we can possibly get.

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_space_conference

Comments to Open Space – where we may be going wrong

Stanley Frielick said...

Hi Leigh

I think that you (through your exchange with Derek) have highlighted a key issue for those of us who are contributing \$ towards this 'conference' and at the same time trying to align it with the 'true open space' ethos. In my understanding this is:

*In Open Space meetings, events and organizations, participants
create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around
a central theme of strategic importance, such as: What is the strategy,
group, organization or community that all stakeholders can support and
work together to create?*

<http://www.openspaceworld.org/cgi/wiki.cgi?AboutOpenSpace>

You have suggested that the objective (the strategic theme ?) is "The objective of this event is to initiate and strengthen new connections and thereby changes in the New Zealand education sector. The key to meeting this objective is through open participation."

IMHO - it's a bit naïve to imagine that 'changes' (what kind of change?) can be brought about simply through the initiation of new connections ... Wish it were that easy ! :) Real educational change requires action on many levels - political, economic, institutional, curriculum, theory, practice, epistemology, ontology, oops forgot technology, etc - ie. it's a systemic process (eg. Michael Fullan for more on this ...)

So the key issue for me is - I think we all need to be very clear about who the stakeholders are, what kinds of changes in the education sector are being envisaged by you and the FLNW group (ie. let's get really specific about the strategic theme/s), and what kinds of outcomes can those who are contributing \$ reasonably expect ?

I would suggest that the key stakeholders are those institutions and others who are contributing (mainly NZ public \$) towards the conference... In my own case, I am responsible for \$ contributions towards the FLNW event from 2 sources of NZ public funds - the CeLDD²³ and FLLinNZ²⁴ - awaiting update for 2006/07 projects funded by the eLearning Collaborative Development Fund.

As I've stated on this list - CeLDD is a new qualification in NZ that grapples with the question 'how to

²³ <http://celdd.ose.org.nz>

²⁴ <http://www.fillinnz.ac.nz>

structure a qualification in e-learning design (for tertiary and secondary teachers, instructional/learning designers, technical staff, etc) that embraces emerging learning 2.0 tools and ideas.' CeLDD is an important point of departure for our institution, as the emerging themes of learning 2.0 hold much promise for networked and distributed learning in our region. For the Friday 22 Sep sessions, I have asked for the FLNW group to provide some input on their thoughts and propose some suggestions for topics - OK, that was not exactly 'open space' stuff, but I'm essentially proposing that the strategic theme for that day is 'e-learning in Northland: implications for change'. I'm sure that specific agenda/s will emerge and the staff of NorthTec and members of the wider community who attend will participate – but it would be good to see some advance thinking on this - just to reassure me that the FLNW guests are on the same page (we've heard lots about baa-camps and the weather but almost nothing about how FLNW can contribute towards 'changes in the NZ education sector' :). My expectations are that the day will create new connections and local participants will come away with a deeper understanding of how emerging tools and educational approaches can enhance and improve their practice.....

On Sat 23rd as stated- the strategic theme is for the FLNW group to act as an international reference group and provide detailed feedback on the CeLDD programme. My expectations are that the FLNW group will participate in this spirit and provide a level of international 'benchmarking' while at the same time continuing with the theme of 'change in the NZ sector' (CeLDD is a bit different from existing quals in e-learning in NZ :)

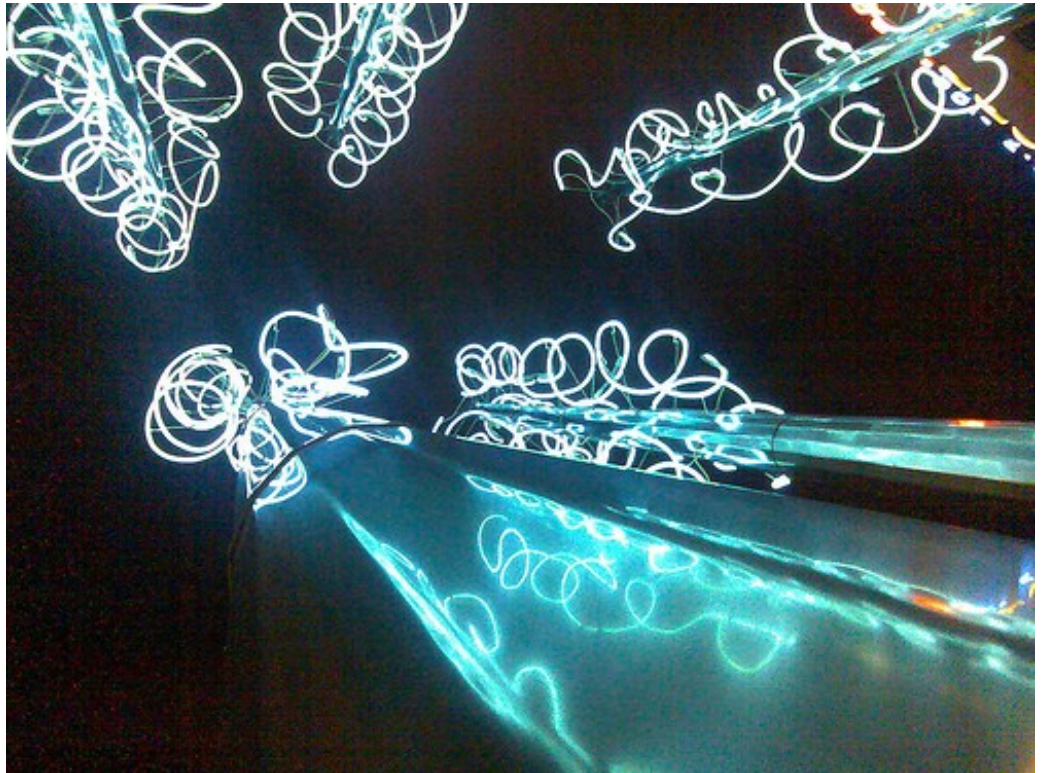
I am also trying to set up a workshop with representatives from the FLLinNZ group - this will have the strategic theme of "FLLinNZ and the Future of Networked Learning: Strategies for international collaboration" which will utilise the expertise of the visiting group to workshop with FLLinNZers to explore how can we foster international linkages in the spirit of our vision "building collective capacity in distributed networks". There will be more on this once the event has been confirmed....

I'm personally quite happy that these kinds of contributions to the conference coffers are appropriate uses of public funds - but I do think we need some more substance on the overall strategic themes and how each leg of the journey contributes to that. There will be scrutiny and we need more than T-shirts in terms of outcomes :) - even if this kind of rebalancing and refocusing does pose some slight risk to the 'true open space' ethos....

Cheers

Stanley

PS - I will provide more about me in terms of a profile when I get a chance - just a bit hectic at the moment trying to persuade my stakeholders that 'open space' is actually 'productive' and not just a cool sightseeing trip :)



<http://flickr.com/photos/margoconnell/259707815/>

Rose Grozdanic said...

Hi Stanley

Thanks for sharing your expectations with us. As the Northland host it's good to hear you articulate some of the issues, agendas and strategically important themes that are likely to emerge during the Northland leg of the trip. In particular I share your hope that "...the day will create new connections and local participants will come away with a deeper understanding of how emerging tools and educational approaches can enhance and improve their practice.....". I'm sure that everyone involved on every leg of the journey has the same realistic expectation of personal and professional enrichment.

Your goal: "On Sat 23rd as stated- the strategic theme is for the FLNW group to act as an international reference group and provide detailed feedback on the CeLDD programme. My expectations are that the

FLNW group will participate in this spirit and provide a level of international 'benchmarking' while at the same time continuing with the theme of 'change in the NZ sector' is, in my opinion, a more ambitious one. (But then, I don't believe in "benchmarking" per se in a field where the goal posts keep moving and anyone working in the area can only ever be working at the edges of what's known). Where I believe you'll get "bang for your buck" is in the collective creativity of the group (including your staff) in looking at assumptions, listening, asking the "dumb" questions, sharing stories about similar programs and courses, thinking "what if?", looking at specific scenarios and so on, rather than specifically acting as a panel providing "feedback on a course" as such. (For instance I'm reminded of a content-less course run by TAFE NSW a few years ago called FAME²⁵ that was, by all accounts, fabulous. The idea of a content-free course is probably counter intuitive to most educators but the strength in the FAME course was that each "course" (where the content was developed by the learners) ended up being tailored to the needs of each specific student cohort, was always up to date, reusable as a model and so on. And if you look at web 2.0, there's a similar sort of underlying "design" as there was in FAME it's just there wasn't a word for it back then. But anyway, I'm only speaking for myself here - there may be others in the group who are much more comfortable with the idea of presenting themselves as "experts" in the field.

Essentially I don't see a problem with anything you've said in terms of the parts of the trip you're sponsoring. Each agenda will be in the hands of the group, including the virtual groups from other parts of the world who will be "dropping in" throughout the trip - there's no reason why you can't start populating the wiki with your ideas and inviting your staff to add their topics. Perhaps that will then generate the sort of response you are wanting in terms of identified themes, outcomes and activities prior to the Northland event.

On a more personal note, I'm a bit stung by your comment about "baaa" camp and my asking about the weather. I thought *I* was being polite when I didn't publicly splutter at Bronwyn's description of 16-20 as "balmy" (balmy?!? geez Bronwyn! :-)). To me the baaa camp idea is the text equivalent of the wizard graphic you have on the front page of your grad cert course - a digital version of something informal in the absence of more commonly recognised mammalian gestures. Especially in the context of a community gathering such as FLNW where there'll be lots of old and new friends meeting up in real time to do something creative and enjoyable together. Perhaps I should have had these conversations in the TALO google list given that the baaa camp related to our 2006 swapmeet which is where this whole unconference started (and in fact will start this year as the first event in the FLNW program). So apologies for mixing the metaphoric environments... Won't do THAT again, eh? :-)

And the little kid in me looks at statements like "but I do think we need some more substance on the overall strategic themes and how each leg of the journey contributes to that. There will be scrutiny and we need more than T-shirts in terms of outcomes :)" and curls up into a small ball (baaa camp t-shirt'n'all! :-))). Mostly cos it starts to sound like "how we've always done things" rather than trying something else. Who says there has to be an overall strategic theme? And if so, great. Every stakeholder here is also a participant so instead of scrutinising from afar, maybe they could update the wiki, join a conversation, test their ideas. Unconference doesn't equate to unsubstantial. It just means that you don't predict everything in advance or attempt to impose a structure on it, trusting the group to form their own goals, agendas and so on and following the themes that have genuine intrinsic value and energy. And if it doesn't work, fine. We've learned something. But at least we gave it a shot and will be able to describe why it didn't work.

In fact, anyone "scrutinising" this event for evidence of fluffiness or lack of underlying value should be forced to come along. They'll be exhausted by end of it, I'll wager. And as for the sightseeing junket idea, it's a bit

25 <http://learn.rit.tafensw.edu.au/RVC/FAMe.htm>

offensive to think that some of the sponsors might see us as freeloaders or whatever. Surely that's not what you're saying!?! :-/

I'm visiting your country in a spirit of openness, curiosity, excitement and great anticipation. Mostly as a learner but also someone who's happy to share what I know, think, believe and feel. But mostly as a learner. I'd feel like an imposter if I attended under any other "label". (I just needed to say that so that I can enjoy my excitement instead of feeling the dread of performance anxiety/weight of other people's expectations).

Sincerely

rose "12 more sleeps!" g :o)

Stephen Downes said...

I have always tried to make my talks and sessions learner centered – I come in with an agenda, but I say at the outset, this talk is in your hands, you can direct it wherever you want. Usually they are happy with my agenda, but not always. Yesterday's workshop, for example (audio available soon, I hope) is an example, where we went way off the agenda. But did people learn? Yes - and rather more than they would have learned have I tried to plan and implement the plan.

I have noticed, however, that when I try to turn control over to the learners, there is a tendency for someone else to step in - usually the funder of the event, or more likely, a proxy for that funder – who decides to substitute their own expertise for both my expertise and that of the group, and to implement their own planning, and manage the outcomes. And then, when it fails, to hold the presenter of the workshop accountable, or worse, the audience.

I have in recent years adopted the attitude that people do not acquire instant expertise because they fund something, and that when I am invited to host or participate in a session, I will manage my own participation in my own way. Because a central part of the theory I have developed and that I believe is that this sort of management doesn't work. My seminars, presentations and workshops, therefore, are *instantiations* of my theory, and not merely descriptions of my theory (and again, I've learned, it's pretty futile to simply describe the theory - people will politely listen and then go back to what they have already done).

The 'outcome', therefore, of one of my talks (or for that matter, any session I attend, because I'm a disruptive influence), if anyone needs a formalized outcome (which I don't recommend, since each individual has their own expectations and needs, which simply cannot be substituted by fiat by authority) is "this method works with this group". The outcome is that we are providing evidence that the method works, we are giving participants experience with the method, and we expect (but cannot promise) that their practices will be changed as a result.

From time to time I do have organizers who state that they would like something more concrete in terms of outcomes, methodologies, processes, assessment, and the like. I gently and politely tell such funders that if they really feel this way, they should fund someone else. This is not said with malice or anything like that, but out of simple recognition of the fact that if a person wants roses, then they should buy roses, and not tulips - and it is unreasonable for us to go in there and pretend that our tulips are roses. They're not. But - we think - they're pretty good tulips. And skeptics can always look at the slides and audio from previous sessions, my own at least.

-- Stephen

Sean FitzGerald said

I'm glad Leigh realised things were starting to go a bit pear-shaped – I applaud his courage for speaking up about it.

And I'm glad others have expressed their misgivings about the direction this 'conference' is going and Stanley's expectations.

Stephan and Rose have already articulated much of my thoughts, but I feel I should add my 2 cents...

This thing is starting to get bigger than Ben Hur... and it's starting to sound more like Boot Camp than Baaa Camp.

When Leigh invited me to join the tour and become one of the 'star' international speakers my understanding was that the event would be an open space conference, meaning that the organisers would provide some space and we would - collectively - decide what we would be talking about and how we would be talking about it. This includes the locals (not just the local organisers, but the local participants as well).

Those of us from overseas were to be enticed with the offer of paid expenses (some of us still paying for our tickets over), but essentially it was going to a chat fest between ourselves and with the locals about our perspectives on 'The Future of Learning in Networked World'. And it was going to be an extension of the TALO Swapmeet which would be modelled on the one I attended in 2005.

But each day something else gets added to the wiki that looks very much like traditional conferences with panels and workshops and presentations all about topics decided by the institutions involved.

Don't get me wrong... I am more than happy to do my bit and engage with the locals and make my contribution and share my knowledge and ideas in exchange for expenses paid, but it seems like every institution wants to extract its pound of flesh from us, and I fear that by the end of it we will be looking like exhausted, ragged skeletons!

And as far as content is concerned much of the work of the other presenters to do with schools and assessments etc. doesn't interest me that much at the moment, but I'm more than happy to share my perspective on some of these topics.

But if you think I'm going to talk about core competencies (other than to say why they don't fit into a networked learning model) or are going to get woken up to be part of 'an international reference panel to provide an expert perspective on NorthTec Certificate in e-Learning Design and Development (CeLDD)' at 8am on the morning of Saturday 23rd then you are mistaken.

As far as my interests go, along with Jo Kay my latest passion is for virtual worlds, especially Second Life, and the profound impact I believe they are going to have on the web in general and the future of education in particular.

Leigh assured me there would be plenty of time to include topics of our own interest (that's what an open space conference is about, after all), but at the moment I'm wondering where we are going to fit it in, because the whole event is getting so highly structured with every block of time booked out, with others

deciding the agenda.

Just because it's supposed to be an open space conference doesn't mean we are planning to just rock up on the day totally unprepared though. The planning phase has already begun.

I'm subscribed to the wiki's RSS feed and people are putting in an immense effort coming up with all sorts of ideas of how to make this a really exciting and dynamic, experiential, interactive, multi-media event that is linked in with the rest of the world and is a model of networked learning in action, as opposed to a trail of trad events in trad places with us ending up as the 'expert's' sitting up the front sharing our wisdom with a passive audience.

I don't like the latter model because a) it puts too much pressure on me, and b) I'd rather be out there doing it, rather than sitting in a room talking about it.

I haven't done my bit on the wiki yet, but when Jo Kay and I have more time next week, we had planned to brainstorm ideas and see how we can weave some Second Life stuff into the tour (if we can find some space in the program!)

Stanley, I'm offended at what seems to be an implication that we are going to rock up and have a party and treat this is some sort of junket.

Sure will have a party, but a lot of good work will be done as well. ;-)

I for one don't operate on this - 'outlining in advance the specifics of what were are going to offer' - model either. That doesn't work for me... the world isn't like that anymore!

If you want assurance that you are going to get bang for you buck then perhaps you need to do a bit of homework and look at the portfolios and the credentials of the people who are attending and see what we are all capable of.

I think you need to be aware of the wealth of knowledge and creative nthinking about what education is and will become (and needs to become in order for educational institutions like yours to stay relevant) provided by the visiting speakers and appreciate the opportunity this presents.

(I only barely include myself in this btw, as I am humbled to be on the same bill as some of the elearning world's greats.)

If you require guaranteed specifics of what I'm going to deliver up front then perhaps I'm not the guy for you.

All the fun is getting sapped out of this now.

If things don't start looking up from here I'm just going to do the TALO Swapmeet, maybe Christchurch and then jump ship to avoid all heavy expectations which seem to be concentrated in the northern part of the trip (although I would be disappointed to miss out on Waiheke) and join Marg in Wellington at the World of Wearable art (it was me who added the link, Marg), and spend the rest of my time in NZ sight-seeing and having some fun.

I don't want to feel like I'm being frogged marched around NZ on some highly organised and structured, precision-planned, military style tour-of-duty.

Most of us can command AU\$1000 a day for the type of all day workshops that people are proposing, and

what is being expected of us in return for our participation is getting to the point where it's not really worth it for me. I'd rather pay for my own expenses and do my own thing.

I'm sorry for being a bit ranty... but I'm angry... I've had enough of beating my head against bureaucratic brick walls trying to get them to see what's happening in the world of elearning and I'm sick of new models being judged by old standards and found wanting - of course they will be!

I've had enough of this type of top-down organisation and bureaucracy in my life of late and this trip was supposed to be a break from all of that and an opportunity to explore other models in practice. In fact I'm so over beating my head against those brick walls that this may very well be my 'Farewell to E-learning Tour'.

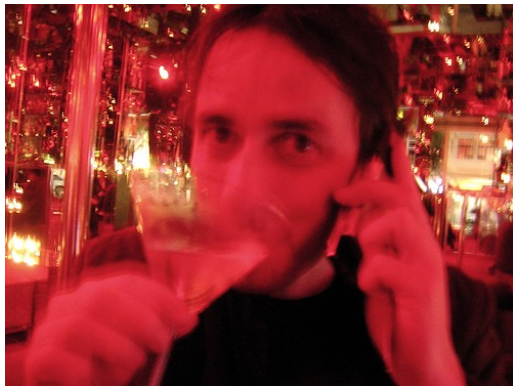
But instead of being a break from all of that it's starting to look like more of the same.

I hope we can sort this out. I'd love to participate and I think a really rewarding and good time can be had by all (and yes, funding bodies can get their money's worth, they might just have to learn to assess their return for investment in new ways).

Cheers.

Sean

Alexander Hayes said



<http://flickr.com/photos/bee/255973252/>

I've held off saying anything much till I'd achieved the following.

Booked.

Paid.

Flight out from Sydney - Fri. 22 Sep. 06 [18:30]

Arrive - Auckland 23:30

Step 1 - Find the bar. I'll be in an open space to communicate.....from then till I depart.

Flight out from Auckland - Sat. 30 Sep. 06 [06:10]

I'm coming to NZ to exchange ideas and experiences.

I've spent the same amount of money on this flight as I would on a new generation mobile device. I've delayed a child support payment and delayed a job interview. I've also put off a trip to be working with the Parnngurr mob out in Alice Springs till November to get to NZ.

No doubt you have all done the same....taken the plunge. Faced your demons or otherwise shifted your working realities to attend.

My intent is to interact, blog events, moblog what I'm seeing, podcast my thoughts, collaboratively mesh and mangle some mobile learning ware, recite some late night poetry and demystify for any number of Aussie's

how an open and networked world conference really works.

I honour the fact that I will be supported with accommodation etc. during my stay.

My energy (in exchange for this generosity) will be imparted as; willing to burn the midnight oil, chew the fat, be exploited by well meaning conference dis-organisation and generally participate communicate / collaborate as invited in what already appears to be ordered chaos.

I'm not humbled to be participating in this event nor do I consider my contributions to be any greater or lesser than any other human attending this event. I'm going to be there because I choose to be.

I am humbled though to be considered and included. My hope is that I will have the opportunity to bring this great range of moments together to benefit others, now and in the future.

I'm happy that I can say I've been to TALO 1. I'll be happier still to say that in 2006 I drank de-caffienated coffee with Stephen Downes, Scotch on the Rocks with Leigh Blackall and SMS messaging with Teemu.....amongst many other geeky karaoke moments.

For me, it's a celebration of all things e-learning and mlearning and it's a massive working exercise to share and distribute this knowledge and get this all happening.

The social dividends of this event far outweigh any performance or statistical cost based analysis.

Lets not forget those that lost their lives running conferences at break neck speed, on huge budgets, delivered to so little, for so much, only to arrive at nothing that meant anything to those that truly sought sustainable education practice in a networked world - this open conference however promises to reverse such trends.

Marg O'Connell said...

This has been a worthy discussion and has brought much into the open - thanks to all for sharing!

Sean I hear a lot of what you're saying and am thankful that expectations from both within the group and those supporting the group have clarified people's standpoints.

Rose, can save me a t-shirt? ;-P

I'm really looking forward to meeting up with you all in Wellington. And I'm really excited to read/write/view/map the tour 'virtually' until I'm there in the flesh! :o) I'm all for a barbie in the park and a good old chat if you all are!

We all have lots to offer, including those 'less visible' and once the tour begins it will take on a life of its own and no doubt become more than any of us expected! Alex, let me know when you find that bar.

Let's hope Stephen can join us - I'm so impressed with the rallying to Stephen's cause that I'm convinced this bunch of doers will break open the formalities and see some real informal learning take place!

Warmest wishes, Marg

P.S. Leigh, you wouldn't believe how late our snow season has been here. I'm already thinking a ski trip to

NZ may be next on the cards. Hope my knees can hold up from snowboarding! :o)

Stanley Frielick said...

Thanks all for your excellent responses and clarifications - you have more than reassured me that we will have deep and meaningful conversations here (guess I should have kept my big mouth shut :). I must say that I was personally not worried at all, but there have been questions from others - probably due to the public nature of this list ... ? I was a tad provocative but only because I am under a bit of scrutiny, and was also disconcerted by the apparent silence around the actual purposes of the conference. I have had lots of open spaces on the Northland part of the wiki for weeks (including the stated intention for the CeLDD session) and just wondered what exactly what was going to happen here...

My sincere apologies if I created an impression that I was slighting any particular person by my comments about the discourse on the list so far. I am the one who should be (and is :) feeling the weight of performance expectations - so please don't feel under any pressure on that score - and I guess I got a bit carried away in letting off of some of that steam. I am primarily a learner and engage in that spirit - but I also have this management role where things like hierarchy and accountability unfortunately come into play - but please don't let that put you off! And I hope I haven't unintentionally deflated any enthusiasm and excitement. ..

We are entering very new territory (at least in Northland) with this event, and as Leigh suggested there is a major tension between traditional assumptions and the new approaches of open space, unconferences, Stephen's method, etc. I'm very supportive of these new approaches - hey, I've even written about 'de-learning' (d comes before e- learning²⁶ :) - but I just wanted to be upfront about some of these tensions - kinda like doing 'damage control' before the event ? - so that everyone was aware of the submerged issues before they were possibly and unexpectedly sprung on you while you are here ... Again, I hope that I haven't put a spanner in the works but I do feel that the air has been cleared and from our perspective at least there is no risk of any misperception about the tour (and I was just relaying others' perceptions of a 'junket' not my own).

If you want to sleep in on Sat 23 no problem - the rooms are really comfy :) But it might be a really fun morning. I'm not looking for a pound of flesh - the development of CeLDD has been profoundly influenced by Stephen's work, and the notion of digital game based learning, and social networking tools, and after looking up all your portfolios and credentials (months ago :) I thought that the FLNW group was ideal as a reference 'marker' for us - seeing as no-one else has yet developed a formal qual along these lines in NZ ... I hope that you can engage in that ethos even if it isn't exactly an 'open space' event (but I'm sure we can find ways of accommodating that approach ?)

Anyway - Northland has been right behind the event from the start and we were among the first to pledge a contribution. I and many of my colleagues are really impressed by the level of energy and spark that Leigh has brought to e-learning in NZ, and personally I can't wait to meet you all and welcome you (three times :) to Northland. We are all really appreciative of the commitment you have made and there is a lot of excitement and anticipation here.

Wishing you all a safe trip and many rewarding conversations, dialogues and exchanges (and celebrations and reciting of late night poetry) along the way ...

26 <http://www.malts.ed.ac.uk/ice2/abstracts/frielick.htm>

Cheers

Stanley



<http://flickr.com/photos/teachandlearn/253705768/>

Rose Grozdanic said...

Wonderful. i look forward to the opportunity to translate some of these pixels into a warm mammalian handshake when we meet.

Cheers

rose :-)

Leigh Blackall said...

Ah! :) this is great.

An excellent thing to watch unfold, and one of the best forum discussions I have witnessed. Alex as usual added a flavour of imagination that speaks volumes to me. Rose, Stephen deeply thought provoking responses that

captured the spectrum of ideas, and Sean upping the ante and helping us get it all out in the open.

Thanks Stanley for your final response on this, and for challenging us all in this way. It was a stress out for a moment there, but has turned out for the best I think. Yes Northland was the first to commit to this adventure, with Stanley being one of our champions to the Flexible Learning Leaders in NZ group - trying to get extra financial support.

This exchange reassures me that this meeting will be an excellent demonstration of open networked communications.

Many thanks, I feel all set to go practice some relaxing telemark turns in the mountains this weekend - and find a karaoke bar to ready myself for Alex's arrival.

Leigh

Professional Development - The Usability and Empowerment Divide, Unconferences and the Role of Management – Steven Parker

<http://networklearning.blogspot.com/2006/11/professional-development-usability-and.html>

Recently I was lucky enough to have attended a number of professional development events in New Zealand as part of the Future of Learning in a Networked World tour where the potentialities of unstructured professional group learning were revealed, that is the unstructured conversational ad hoc tell me what I want to know talk to me about what I'm interested in nature of the unconference format.

'An unconference event begins with face to face schedule making which allows for emerging developments in the rapidly moving technology field to be covered. The opening includes time for attendees to introduce themselves and orient to the whole group. Participants are invited to write their name and session topic on an 8.5×11 piece of paper. They announce the title of their session to the whole room and then post it on a schedule on the wall. Once all the sessions have been posted, the community can stand in front of the schedule wall and decide which sessions they would like to attend. Sessions are about an hour long with 15 min breaks. Lunch lasts for about an hour. The day closes with all the participants gathering in a circle in one room and sharing for 20–30 min the highlights of the day.'

Also check out the feedback from participants from Auckland on unconference format²⁷.

Consider the following similar learning environment for smaller groups, in particular the use of open space for clusters of conversational activity for all levels of learning.



I asked Jana Holly of <http://mindesign.co.nz/> how she felt about her sense of participation.

Steven- So you're part of the circus called FLNW and you feel like a participating audience member?

Jana- When I walked into this room I realised here was rings of activity going on, it was all very entertaining and exciting and I want to participate but

²⁷ <http://blip.tv/file/80183>

I'm also more in an audience role.

Steven- Would you say you are participating in the style that Leigh is explaining to you (relaxed conversational show and tell)

Jana- It feels to me like my very presence here contributes to the process even if my fingers don't touch the keyboard.

Steven_ Would you be able to take what Leigh has just shown you and use it yourself?

Jana_ I think with practice yes, I'll have to go to the circus summer school.

Leigh_ I think it's important thinking there that just by being here you are contributing. A lot of people even in our group feel like - what am I here for - because they are not very vocal, but just by being here is enough.

The problem of the Usability and Empowerment Divide

Read Jakob Nielsen's Digital Divide: The Three Stages²⁸, a very revealing paper on the barriers to the divide on the use of technology and lack of digital literacy skills. Ken Burgin of Profitable Hospitality neatly summarises the issues raised²⁹, there is:

- 'An Economic Divide - who can and can't afford a computer (and I would add, fast broadband). Less of an issue in Australia with el-cheapo PCs and \$2 ph internet cafes.
- A Usability Divide - problems related to lower literacy and for difficulties in understanding for seniors.
- An Empowerment Divide - inability to use search, access to good software or participation in useful social networks.'

The Usability and Empowerment Problem

The Usability and Empowerment Divide is worrying in the context of the many thousands of teachers who may be getting left behind in terms of the opportunities to develop skills and knowledge for today's knowledge economy.

What role does management play within an organisation in addressing this?

Consider Don Perrin's assertion from his paper 'The New Knowledge Society and Higher Education'³⁰ from 1996, ten years ago!

28 <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/digital-divide.html>

29 <http://www.profitablehospitality.com/public/department30.cfm>

30 <http://www.detcne.org/Resources/perrin2hed.htm>

Drucker, in his "Theory of the Business" published in the Harvard Business Review, postulates that for an organization to be effective there must be a balance between environment, in this case the students, employers, and extended community; the university mission should reflect client needs and expectations, and competencies, in this case relevant professional and teaching skills of faculty. The academy as we know it is being challenged in all three areas, and to the extent that these three areas are out of balance, effectiveness is reduced. In 1987, Herbert London predicted the Death of the University as we know it because low cost alternatives are responsive to learner needs and schedules. Open universities, corporate universities, distance education, and electronic universities are increasing their market share while traditional universities are hamstrung by diminishing resources, inflexible hiring and tenure systems, outdated curricula, and insular attitudes.

'The luxury of having thousands of teachers researching and producing their own courses, many of which are essentially similar, is grossly inefficient. Students will be empowered to explore, inquire, and learn cooperatively and interactively, and undertake more creative tasks. They will have access to great teachers in a spectrum of learning styles and a variety of media. Consortia of institutions will share their best teachers through quality lesson materials for their virtual classrooms as well as for on-campus courses.'

'It is important to identify new markets and ways to market and deliver educational programs. The biggest untapped market for education is the non-traditional learner.'

Some schools are responding accordingly for example – this interview with Greg Whitby from the Australian Catholic School sector:



In his paper Jakob Nielsen asserts 'Almost 40% of the [US] population has lower literacy skills'. If this is the case in [Australian] educational organisations then what is needed is the awareness and will of management to strategically identify mentors and innovators and enable those with low level digital literacy skills to get together en-mass when needed. (in terms of raising awareness in this context the concept and ideas of the unconference seems appropriate).

Assertion: In Professional Development Make the best of your organisations assets, teacher's collective skills knowledge talents and energy en-mass?

Many educational technologists including myself are making the obvious assertion that the latent knowledge talents and skills needed that need to overcome the

Usability and Empowerment Divide already exist within educational organisations. Innovators and Mentors can be harnessed to support educators with basic to intermediate skills working with them in groups, both

online and face to face.

- Learning from each other in short intense bursts of group activity
- Discussing what technologies teaching practices and relevant to them and off interest
- Connecting together using technology
- Using show and tell in the context of their teaching
- Asking questions off each other continually over time. .

To enable this what is needed is management support and strategic programming of regular organisational professional development events in day to day activities that enable group learning and communication between teachers and that are driven by the learning needs of teachers.

In this context Management's role and responsibility is to enable teachers the time and resources to autonomously organise PD events. For example helping motivated teachers to get the numbers and attract interest from peers to make an unconference PD event economically viable.

Why not?:

- Fund short professional development events which enable interested teacher's of all skill levels (basic to advanced) to physically and freely come together in large groups for a few hours, to gain skills, freely communicate with each other ask questions and figure things out together in an ad hoc manner as part of day to day business.
- Identify existing Mentors and support and enable them to show their peers how to communicate and connect with each other online

For those with lower literacy skills Mentors can demonstrate what's possible. The group supporting each other and instilling confidence in those who lack confidence individually.

Teacher's with lower level literacy skills can also seek more focused structured professional development if required. It is the Educational technologist's responsibility to enable people of all skill levels to access open professional development and be able to connect and ask questions of each other.

Teachers responsibility following PD

The individuals responsibility is to connect their resultant work with their students, learning group and peers after the PD event so that others can learn from their activity over time.

To seek more further professional development to overcome basic digital literacy barriers if needed.

This is all nothing new but the reality is it's very difficult to sustainability implement these ideas within an organization without Management continuing to promote teachers ongoing participation in day to day teaching

Top Down' support for bottom up networking of teachers is required to: Bring about Organisational Change

- Sustainability - Follow through with the support of the implementation of mentor networks at an organisational level through PD- Professional Development
- Adaptability – Be flexible and responsive to the emergent needs of the 'Teacher Innovation Network'. Eg: Recognising the time and equipment needed to adopt new innovative practices that work
- Enablement - Give teachers ability to self regulate what gets filtered through firewall, and take on the development through to the students and Teacher Network

Conclusion

Managers and Head Teachers need to drive and facilitate this change in order to begin to address the problem of the Usability and Empowerment Divide. Participation can't obviously be enforced from all teachers, however a culture of networked innovation in day-to-day activities will promote participation and sharing practices as part of a wider sustainable professional development model. More research has to occur into the unconference format. These type of group learning events will not solve the vast digital divide immediately they can energise and can catalyse the interest and awareness of those people who wish to become informed with the implicit aim that attendees

- Start to ask question each other
- Become familiar with group learning and
- Support each other in developing their skill development and shared knowledge OVER TIME!!!!

As the pace of change ramps up in the knowledge economy many teachers will be unable to remain informed and keep up. Without innovative professional development action en-mass it appears the Usability and Empowerment Divide in relation to technology and new teaching practices may become so difficult to overcome that many people, teachers, students and management alike will fail to relate to each other's professional working world thus impacting on the business of the 'educational' organisation.

Comments to Professional Development - The Usability and Empowerment Divide, Unconferences and the Role of Management

Leigh Blackall

Nice one sparks! Have added it to the book. I think management should adopt and model the desired behavioral change, and offer real incentives, such as - "here's an extra \$200 per month if you start logging and documenting your work in a communicative format (such as a blog of some sort)". Those extra \$200 come from a redirection of funds normally allocated to formal and mostly unsuccessful staff training exercises.

Conviviality and the FLNW (un) Conference – Artichoke

http://artichoke.typepad.com/artichoke/2006/09/conviviality_an.html

Manovich asks “What kind of cinema is appropriate for the age of Google and blogging? Automatic surveillance and self-guided missiles? Consumer profiling and CNN? “ We have been asking much the same questions about learning (and teaching) in Dunedin this week.

When I think for a while I create a shadow map, an imagining of the “rivers north of the future” that helps me understand, what I am seeking, and begin to appreciate the poetry in its form. And it often takes an environment that fosters conviviality and the company of friends for me to tease out the mycchorhizal threads of my thinking.

I want to add The Albert Arms, to an Artichokean Google Map of places where new thinkings are shaken out, smoothed flat with an elbow, and pinned at the corners with a beer glass or three. Also I must add The Albert Arms as the place where we first explored the nuance of a folded Konrad.

We talked into the night about what the future of learning in a networked world might be like and our conversations were “burdened with stone-engraved shadows,” the weight of all that has been.” (Charles Taylor in foreword of *The Rivers North of the Future* - Cayley 2005).

What I came to think in the early hours of this morning is that one issue that is central to our imaginings about learning in a networked world, one issue that represents the weight of all that has been, is how we understand “freedom”.

We are willing enough to praise freedom when she is safely tucked away in the past and cannot be a nuisance. In the present, amidst dangers whose outcome we cannot foresee, we get nervous about her, and admit censorship. E.M.Forster

Comments on Conviviality and the FLNW (un) Conference

Jeremy

There's a real warmth and richness in this little post...would have loved to get in on a few of those beers and conversations.

CJ

I dunno Arti - you have this luvly nack of prompting stuff from the murky depths aka my mind, if I have not lost it already. All I'd say is that "freedom" whatever she looks like in the new networked world won't obey most if any of the current rules/ways of thinking about her. I'm a fan of the work of the Berkman Centre at Harvard where issues in relation to this are often discussed via their terrific set of MP3s they make available

Artichoke

Jeremy it is a magical initiative - and I just know that you would have thrived in the uncertain landscapes of exploratory conversations we had in Dunedin - think you should contact Leigh and arrange to link into the conversations on the tour around New Zealand. Or at the very least find out how to run away and join the next one.

Check out the participants list on the wiki for Leigh's contact details

JoKay

What an awesome post Arti! You've summed up our evening beautifully, and I'm sooo glad we got to meet you in the flesh!

Sad that we didn't get a quick hug goodbye at the airport.... sooo... Go Hug Yourself!! You are OUTSTANDING!

Artichoke

Ahh cj a deliciously errant mind like yours never settles long enough to be nudged.

Thanks for the link - and the comment - and thanks for keeping the wiki participants from any sense of (e) learning certainty whilst i was in Dunedin

Artichoke

Nice post on New Zealand edublogger Bardwired's blog on exactly these issues wrt freedom and networking in an educational context- Check out Filtering Frustrations

Well i did know it was going to happening - an upgrade of the School Zone filtering system. I had my opportunity to vote on appropriate school content but logging on today i find i can't get into my 3 most used sites - flickr, blogger & delicious.

Janet

Hi folks

Thanks for the EM Forster quote.

We have a cafe called drift that does the same kind of thing as your pub.

As a result there some 50 word yarns at

<http://crankymango.blogspot.com>

The sun drifts behind a cloud. Its cooler and darker inside. We are deep in the old couch, drafting ideas and warming our spirits with the rich brown molten lava. Huge scams are whittled, threshed and teased apart until we rattle our saucers and go, armed with a small purpose.

If you have a mailing list I'd be interested. I guess I'm sort of posting on the edge of copyright/digital access rights

<http://lucychili.blogspot.com>

education(this is the beginnings of a game about commons and copyright)

<http://lucychili.net/sfd/alpha.shtml>

And technical tinkering and remaking. eg. Jewellery from old CD drives.

Artichoke

Thanks for the links Janet - I need to look more closely at the digital access rights copyright thing - and apart from proof reading something on plant breeders protection rights I have not put enough thought into this - I am going to start my new learning at your A2K v DMCA in Australia blog

The tension between encouraging innovation and protecting the investment of time (and resources) this can take and limited access to the world of ideas interests me and I err enormously on the side of openness.

As a once was science person I liked the summary in your Royal Society quote

In short, although IPRs are needed to stimulate innovation and investment, commercial forces are leading in some areas to legislation and case law that unreasonably and unnecessarily restrict freedom to access and use information and to carry out research. This restriction of the commons by patents, copyright and databases is not in the interests of society and unduly hampers scientific endeavour.



<http://flickr.com/photos/margoconnell/253587089/>

Strangecloud

Great quote by EM Forster!

Thanks for sharing your thoughts :)

Artichoke

Thanks for the comment Strangecloud - it reminds me that I have been so distracted by milestone writing and conference conversations that I have forsaken my modblog friends

P2P [Peer to Peer] and learning ecologies – Barbara Dieu, Aaron P. Campbell, and Rudolf Ammann

http://www.iatefl.org.pl/call/j_article25.htm

Abstract

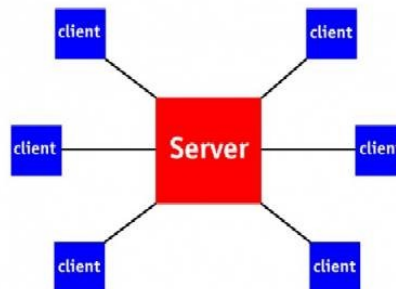
This article briefly introduces the peer-to-peer (P2P) concept and applies it to an educational context. It argues that a pedagogical approach based on P2P can support learning ecologies that both complement and transcend conventional classroom structures and practices, ultimately benefiting learners. The authors discuss both the pedagogical and technological prerequisites for peer-centered learning to occur, suggest possible tools, and provide examples of EFL/ESL projects. Personal Web-publishing in language learning contexts is described as an attempt to bridge the gap between the learners in the classroom and potential conversation partners on the Internet at large, resulting in a network of support and encouragement.

The Background of the P2P Concept

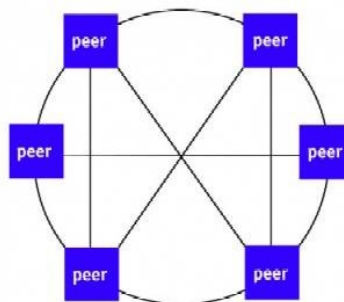
The quality of human interaction is influenced strongly by the social structure in which that interaction occurs. We can gain insight into this relationship by examining the two extremes of network architecture. How the server is configured largely determines how its clients interact. On the one hand is the structured hierarchy of the client/server model, where communication and transaction between any two nodes on the network are mediated through a central server.

On the other hand is the 'peer-to-peer' model (P2P), in which each node in the network functions as both client and server simultaneously, resulting in a decentralized, fluid system of "equipotent members" (Bauwens, 2005). Interaction in P2P networks, then, obeys the dynamics of cooperative participation, where relationships arise organically to meet mutual need and last only as long as that need remains. As Bauwens explains, P2P is not anti-hierarchical or anti-authority, but it mediates against fixed-hierarchies and authoritarianism. The hierarchy that arises in P2P is natural and flexible, and is based on quality of contribution and communal consensus. Both models can and do co-exist.

Historically, the structure of our educational systems has been overwhelmingly of the client/server type, reflecting an industrial capitalist model of production. A rigid administrative and instructional hierarchy (the server) was



Structured Hierarchy mode:
<http://dekita.org/gallery/wiaoc/slides/sc1.png>



Distributed Peer to Peer mode:
<http://dekita.org/gallery/thumbs/141-peertwopeer2.png>

set to deliver standardized knowledge to its students (clients) on a mass scale to meet the demands of society at large. Opportunities for P2P forms of interaction have been limited. The Internet, however, presents us with unique opportunities to practice P2P in more formal educational settings.

To better understand how a peer-centered approach can benefit language learners, it is helpful to examine more closely the teacher-student dynamics of the traditional model. In many institutions, classes are usually large, while time to implement the syllabus is limited, resulting in minimal communication between teachers and students on subjects other than those prescribed by the syllabus. Interaction in the target language generally occurs through classroom simulations, while listening and reading material is selected and presented by the teacher. Very little, if any, interaction occurs with people outside this closed environment. Therefore, students exposed to the target language through contacts at home or work, or those who can afford to travel abroad, are miles ahead of those who have to rely solely on the classroom.

When it comes to implementing technology in such institutions, the pedagogical approach often does not change. Language learning software is purchased, integrated into the curriculum, and delivered to students. Learning management systems are designed to replicate the conventional top-down, controlled transmission of the traditional classroom mode, where learners perform simulated, structured activities in a passive/receptive mode. The use of the Internet in such a model results in materials that are downloaded to complement the textbook or other classroom activities. Real-life participation in authentic modes of communication is rarely attempted, and therefore the communicative and expressive potential of the Web is diminished.

Our world – physical and virtual – is not homogeneous, structured, and standardized; but rather it is complex, diverse, heterogeneous, fluid, and unpredictable. Learners have varying abilities, different skills, and unique personal goals, and yet in the traditional classroom, they are rarely encouraged to show their talents, create their own content, take control over their own learning, and reflect on the process to gain further insight. Deep learning occurs when they put their knowledge and skills into action, when they utilize their creativity and inventiveness, and when they learn from one another through cooperation, striving to gain new insight, knowledge, and skills. Instead of forcing standardized knowledge upon learners in a strict curriculum, how can we guide our students to acquire what they need so they can express their thoughts, share them with others, and negotiate meaning in self-directed ways? How do we move from dependence towards greater independence and inter-dependence? How do we adopt a more process-oriented approach and interact in a more open and decentralized fashion which allows for self-directed participation, informal communication, inter-cultural and inter-linguistic development? Although there are no simple answers available, we can gain insight into possible solutions by examining the concept of learning ecologies.

Learning Ecologies

In the biological world, the field of ecology concerns itself with the study of the patterns of interrelationships between organisms and the environment in which they live. Ecology is a holistic science, and one of its fundamental principles is that of interconnectedness in complexity. No one given organism or environmental factor can ever be isolated and treated as if existing apart from the ecological system, since what happens to that organism affects the ecosystem, and vice versa. Relationships in an ecology are never fixed, but rather self organizing and fluid, shifting in response to ever changing environmental factors. A healthy ecosystem is one in which balance is maintained in the face of these changes. Maximum adaptability and flexibility are keys to its survival and ability to thrive. The structure of a biological ecosystem is not unlike that of the P2P

structure of network architecture as described above, which hinges upon the free cooperation of unique participants in a fluid network. What arises then, in a P2P model of online interaction, is an Internet-based ecosystem, which in an educational context, results in learning following an ecological model.

In his talk "Learning, Working & Playing in the Digital Age," John Seely Brown (2000) offers some guidance on how to best learn in an environment supported by technology. Instead of isolating learners in artificial and rigidly structured courses in which the teacher and selected print media are the main source of knowledge, we should guide our learners towards more fluid and dynamic "learning ecologies" in which "navigation, experiential learning and judgment all come into play in situ," where they can learn through discovery and experimentation, creating and sharing their own content. George Siemens (2005) adds that in these environments "learners can forage for knowledge, information and derive meaning ... acquiring and exploring areas based on self-selected objectives", while Martin Terre Blanche (2005) suggests "transitional ecologies that ease learners' entry into the 'real world', ecologies where seasoned practitioners work and learn." Learning ecologies are "a collection of overlapping communities of interest, cross pollinating with each other, constantly evolving, and largely self organizing." (Siemens 2003)

The advent of the Internet with its open networks of cooperating users and an increasing number of tools and platforms has brought new opportunities for educators to guide learners into such learning ecologies and put them in touch with other speakers of English, so as to develop their communicative competence through authentic interaction.

In order to decide which tools to use and how to best use them, we should first examine where we stand between the extremes of hierarchical structure of traditional institutions and the fluid, ad-hoc learning ecologies. We should then look for ways to bring peer-centered approaches and tools into the curriculum to complement the learning goals. When adopting a tool, we should consider the larger purpose it should serve: how its nature can best support the learners' diverse needs. Some learners need more guidance, while others will need to be encouraged to leave their comfort zones and experience the open spaces before them.

Pedagogy

In EFL/ESL, a peer-centered approach guides learners in a situation where they can use and improve their language skills in self-directed ways while conversing with peers. It gives them access to a distributed network and familiarizes them with the available tools. It also requires teachers to provide assistance: technical, educational and moral.

What are the building blocks of such an interactive process? Brian Alger (2002) mentions people, places, and things as three primary sources of design for learning and puts narrative, interactivity, and mobility at the core of the learning process.

Narrative offers students the opportunity to record their observations, talk about themselves, their interests, and events that have marked their lives, and reflect on how this experience has changed them. Storytelling is creative self-discovery. It develops awareness and encourages them to voice their experience and ideas. It provides a realistic context for communication and interaction, facilitates language practice, develops fluency, and stimulates imagination. Adding voice, photos, and video to the text is a powerful and creative way to illustrate these personal stories and bring them to life.

Language is social and a meaning-making activity. It is through language that we reflect our thoughts, identities and selves. In the dialogical exchange with others and with ourselves we interpret, gain insights, and modify our perspectives constructing meaning and understanding, in different contexts, at different times. Our culture and background (past-me), our project and perspectives (present - I), and the projection of ourselves (future-you) come into play when we connect to people, places and things and act in the world of which we are a part. And it is through this interaction, unfolding and intertwining of processes together with the friction that results from it, that we become more aware of our ambiguities and question our assumptions while learning a foreign language experientially.

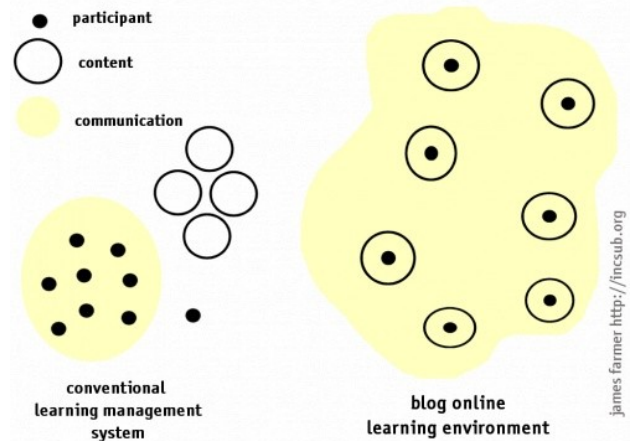
If language learning happens in different contexts, with different people at different times, educators should not confine it to the classroom alone. The world outside does not speak the language of the classroom so we must venture outside its walls. Guiding learners into uncharted territory (learning situations over which neither teachers nor students have complete control) gives them exposure. Letting them interact with whoever they choose according to their interests and needs will allow them to own the words though which they express their identity and voice their thoughts, thus relating the language to their individual selves.

Narrative, interaction and mobility will help learners “develop ecological and interpersonal perceptions in the language, on the basis of which they can construct trans-lingual and trans-cultural selves” (van Lier, 2004).

As for the role of the teacher, Kramsch says (1993, p. 31), “a dialogic pedagogy is unlike traditional pedagogy – it sets new goals for teachers – poetic, psychological, political goals that...do not constitute any easy to follow method...such a pedagogy should be better described, not as a blueprint for how to teach foreign languages but as another way of being a language teacher.”

Tools

A range of new different web-publishing and social networking tools nowadays allows people to improve the quality of their learning experiences and help them become more self-directed learners. Among these tools are weblogs (also known simply as ‘blogs’), which due to their ease of use and low barrier to participation have made it possible for individuals not only to voice their points of view, keep a record of their learning process, and share their personal reflections with others, but also to engage in conversation with peers and tutors worldwide on topics of mutual interest. While broadening their perspectives and negotiating new meanings, learners also monitor their individual performance and



Conventional LMSs compared to blogging systems (after Farmer, 2005, retrieved from <http://dekita.org/gallery/wiaoc/slides/blogenvironment.png>).

verbalize their intentions with increasingly greater fluency. Besides supporting multiple modes of interaction (text, audio, photos, video), these tools enable a truly peer-centered form of communication to arise.

There are a number of different weblogging services and tools available (see the comparative chart at <http://writing.berkeley.edu/tesl-ej/ej35/m1.html>). Free hosted services such as Blogger and Wordpress (see list of URL's at end of article) count among the most widely used and least challenging to novice users. Experienced users who are familiar with Web technology might prefer a self-hosted application that gives them more control over their weblog.

In addition to weblogs, social networking sites can help foster interaction and communication between students. Sites such as 43 Things, 43 Places, and Flickr allow learners to move beyond their classroom, express their interests and share their experiences while connecting with people from around the world. The use of such tools complements the blogging process nicely, helping students to build personal contacts and construct a personal learning network through social networking features like profiles and tagging.

Tagging is an open-ended labeling process (see Folksonomy at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folksonomy>) which enables users to categorize content through freely chosen labels (tags). For example, 43 Things brings people together who share the same goals, which are represented in various ways: in tag clouds that correlate a tag's font size to its popularity (the more popular the bigger), that can be sorted alphabetically, represented in proximity to related tags, etc.

Who does not draw a list of resolutions hoping to achieve them in the short, mid or long run? Students choose goals from the home page list or add their own. They can then describe or justify goals to be accomplished and give advice to others about the ones they have attained while making use of tags to find and skim the goals and profiles of other people, engaging them in conversation using the available commenting features. Making public one's passions, goals, and interests, and discussing them with other people, is much more engaging than learning from a disembodied character in a language textbook.

Similarly, at 43 Places, students can describe their hometowns, talk about places they have visited, and share the destinations they would like to visit in the future. They can also provide travel recommendations and encourage people to explore new places. Through its system of tags and photos, they can also find the most popular spots other people have visited, ask locals for suggestions, or interact with people who want to go to the same places that they do. In this way, students can broaden their horizons by visiting places around the world and interacting with people from different cultures.

Digital cameras and mobile phones have broadened the reach of digital photography. Through photography, we tell stories and talk about previous experiences, many of them personally meaningful. In the process of sharing, we also discover different perspectives, alternative views of the world, unique glimpses of a culture, and insights into humanity through everyday scenes.

Flickr is a social networking site based on photo sharing. Its users post photos to a "photostream" that displays these photos, blog-fashion, in reverse chronological order. Every photo receives its own archival page with a blog-style comment form, and comments can be inscribed below the images and right into the images themselves using "notes". In addition, Flickr offers very sophisticated tools for sorting and classifying photos, including sets and tags.

Flickr can be used with learners of any level who can start by filling information about themselves in the profile section. Then they search for others who share the same interests by clicking on the tags of their choice. After viewing the photos, they can add contacts. Three levels of privacy are offered: contacts, friends

and family.

Flickr users can recognize each other as "contacts" and will have their contacts' most recent photo uploads referenced as "thumbnails" on their personal homepage whenever they log in to the site. Each of these photos, of course, is an invitation to comment, an activity Flickr users avidly engage in. The site's conversational nature is further underscored by the Group feature, the ability of every user to start a group about any topic, and have fellow users either contribute photos to a common group pool or discuss the group's topic on a bulletin board.

Flickr is a good example of a visually rich, participatory, and socially engaging environment that can be successfully used in a language learning context. Reading the comments other people have made helps learners put together a list of expressions they can later adapt and replicate. For low level or intermediate level learners, tagging their own photos with appropriate key words, adding titles, notes, and short descriptions are the first steps to starting conversations in writing (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/17345667@N00/116329924/>). A photo or set of images can serve further as an anchor for personal narratives and story telling or be associated to quotations or poems learners look for on the net and later discuss.

One possible educational use of Flickr is illustrated in a short project on the Dekita headers (<http://dekita.org/weblog/rotating-headers>) which involved two classes of EFL students from Brazil and Japan being introduced to the photographs of Josef Stuefer (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/josefstuefer/>), an Italian photographer who publishes his work on Flickr under the Creative Commons License (<http://creativecommons.org/>). The students chose the photos that should be used for Dekita's header graphics, justified their choices and participated in a conversation with the photographer and Dekita's designer (<http://www.flickr.com/groups/dekita/discuss/49447/>).

This voluntary, largely unplanned, experiential activity brought together people who shared a common interest. It arose organically and involved participants in an authentic exchange rather than a classroom simulation.

When participating in social networking sites such as 43 Things, 43 Places, and Flickr, students gain access to the English language as it is actually being used around the world. Instead of focusing on the language in the abstract, learners become aware of the subtleties of the "living language", of existing discourses and situational needs. As van Lier mentions (2000, p. 246), "from an ecological perspective, the learner is immersed in an environment full of potential meanings". Just as organisms in a biological ecology build relationships with other organisms, students build conversational relationships with other people, thus increasing their exposure to authentic uses of the language.

Cultivating open ecologies

Although the Internet holds great potential for connecting learners with conversational partners in an expressive, self-directed way, we should be aware that by working on the Internet and using its latest tools, we do not necessarily leave behind conventional pedagogy or traditional practices. As weblogs and other tools are slowly finding their way into language courses, teachers need to understand the advantages that peer-oriented uses of the technology can offer, so as not to hamper personal expression, self-directed learning, and the movement toward greater learner autonomy.

Ideally, weblogs give learners a place on the Web to call their own, allowing them to post their links and publish their thoughts, opinions, and feelings to a worldwide audience, thus permitting a wide range of authentic communicative interaction to occur. Yet learner blogs can be easily mishandled, as shut off from the world at large as is the conventional classroom. This usually happens when teachers fail to understand the kind of open ecologies weblogs thrive on and instead treat the medium as a vehicle for online homework submission.

Educators who ask their students to blog might wish to consider questions such as these: Do the posts originate from interests and passions intrinsic to each student, or are they responses to blanket assignments such as, "This week, please write a letter or story following the model we studied in class?" Is reading other blogs, linking, and the building of social networks encouraged? Can outsiders who do not know what happened in class read the weblog, participate, and feel included in the conversation?

In an excellent post on the basics of blogging, Anne Davis (2005) stresses that students need to learn by exploring what others have written, make connections, and strive for writing that matters, and she poses questions that will make a reader think and want to comment:

Some of our best classroom discussions emerge from comments. We share together. We talk about ones that make us soar, ones that make us pause and rethink and we just enjoy sharing those delightful morsels of learning that occur. You can construct lessons around them. You get a chance to foster higher level thinking on the blogs. They read a comment. Then they may read a comment that comments on the comment. They get lots of short quick practices with writing that is directed to them and therein it is highly relevant. Then they have to construct a combined meaning that comes about from thinking about what has been written to them in response to what they wrote. It's such a good way to begin the process of teaching reflective thinking. (February 2, 2006)

In ascribing such a crucial role to comments, Davis implicitly highlights the central importance of learning ecologies. Educators should help language learners become part of such ecologies by taking a peer-centered approach when deciding how to structure learning activities. Once learners develop online relationships with people outside the classroom and become more proficient with the tools that enable them to do so, they are better positioned to attend to their own learning needs beyond the physical and temporal confines of the institution.

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URLs of tools cited

43 Places - <http://43places.com>

43 Things - <http://43things.com>

Blogger - <http://www.blogger.com>

Flickr – <http://www.flickr.com>

Wordpress - <http://www.wordpress.com>

FLNW Day Two – Michael Coghlan

<http://mikecogh.blogspot.com/2006/09/day-2-flnw.html>

Invite a group of elearning experts to gather in one place to take part in an unconference on the Future of Learning in a Networked World and the rest will take care of itself. Konrad Globowski, Teemu Leinonen, Barbara Dieu and I spent several hours wandering around Dunedin yesterday discussing what might happen at such an event. We questioned each other about why we had been invited, and how we might present ourselves and our work at such an unstructured event.

There was a level of uncertainty at how one might 'present', or not present, but the conversation naturally turned to many of the issues that resulted in the need for this kind of event. In essence it is to present an alternative model to the stand and deliver model of the typical conference, and that typifies so much teacher methodology in classrooms. With a new breed of technological tools available that encourage personal publishing and collaborative learning among groups of connected learners it is timely to offer another way of offering professional development that more closely mirrors what might be regarded as better practice for teaching in a networked world.

Fragments of the conversation as we walked included:



<http://flickr.com/photos/teachandlearn/248665433/>

Konrad: the creative aspect is key. Blogs, wikis, repositories for self-created media like YouTube and Odeo offer free publishing and storage of student work that can be used for self-expression, connecting with like-minded students, and even assignments set by imaginative teachers, and that engage students in ways that traditional text based or rote learning may not. The urge to create and make sense of the world through self-expression in various media is a natural human urge and not typically found in average courses. (I didn't have one art lesson in my entire school life.)

Teemu: the railway is a symbol of how connection was expressed in previous eras. In particular, the grandeur of the Dunedin railway station is indicative of its importance at the time. These days connections via the Net join more people across time and space than railways ever could.

Later in the day the entire unconference gang gathered at a Maori marae. Caroline bemoaned the reduced importance of physical place in the new networked world. She wanted her children to feel grounded and know where they come from. I suggested that this notion of place has indeed been reduced in importance, and had been counter balanced with the ability to know people far away from your neighbourhood – people who you perhaps had more in common with than the people who lived next door. The concept of virtual place is now a reality, and rather than detract from my sense of being grounded in my home location, my attachment and enjoyment of home has been enriched by global connections made possible by the Internet. "Home is the where the Internet is."

Teemu : it was only when he realised that he could use them to communicate with people elsewhere that he became interested in them. This initial intrigue has resulted in him taking a path where he has developed a system of communication between a mobile phone and wikipedia. Using this system you can ask for wikipedia for an entry on a particular topic and it will call you back and read back the entry on your queried topic.

Konrad wanted to do his Ph D on the role of blogging in forming communities for year 8 students. When he presented his proposal to his review committee they asked what previous research had been done on this topic. Of course there is none (because it is a new field) and they were consequently not keen to approve his topic. Such courses of higher study are normally assumed to be based on the work of other scholars, and approved on that basis. This is another example of how new tools and approaches (blogging for example) are challenging accepted practice in education. The educational world is now a place where knowledge is being created and distributed via egalitarian networks without a role for the traditional gatekeepers. Published academics are no longer the people you would seek out if you wanted information on most recent good practice in elearning.

So before this unconference had begun, the conversations had already covered:

- The importance of creativity and personal publishing tools in the new and connected world
- The importance of the Internet as tool of connection between people
- The role of the mobile phone as a tool of inquiry and information retrieval
- Changes in how we view the concept of place
- The challenge to education presented by distributed knowledge sharing networks

The learning and discussion on the future of learning had begun in earnest without a single presentation!

Comments to FLNW Day Two

Marg O'Connell said...

Great notes here Michael, thanks for sharing!

I was interested to read Konrad's difficulties in having his PhD proposal rejected - that's not a good sign!

This is an area that interests me - how is the inquiry process, applied 'in situ', being (or not) recognised as research? I think we still have a fair way to go before 'tradition' research processes give way to these forms of connected, democratic and 'hands on' forms of research.

Action research, action learning, participatory and illuminative evaluation have all struggled at the edges, when it really does prove its effectiveness in communities, workplaces and elsewhere!

I trust you're enjoying the tour and hi to Bee and the others! :o)



<http://flickr.com/photos/teachandlearn/248665433/>

Second Life – Joy Kay and Sean FitzGerald





WHAT IS SECOND LIFE?

Second Life is an online 3D virtual world created by Linden Lab.

Similar to massively multiplayer games, Second Life provides an immersive environment for users to meet, play and interact in.

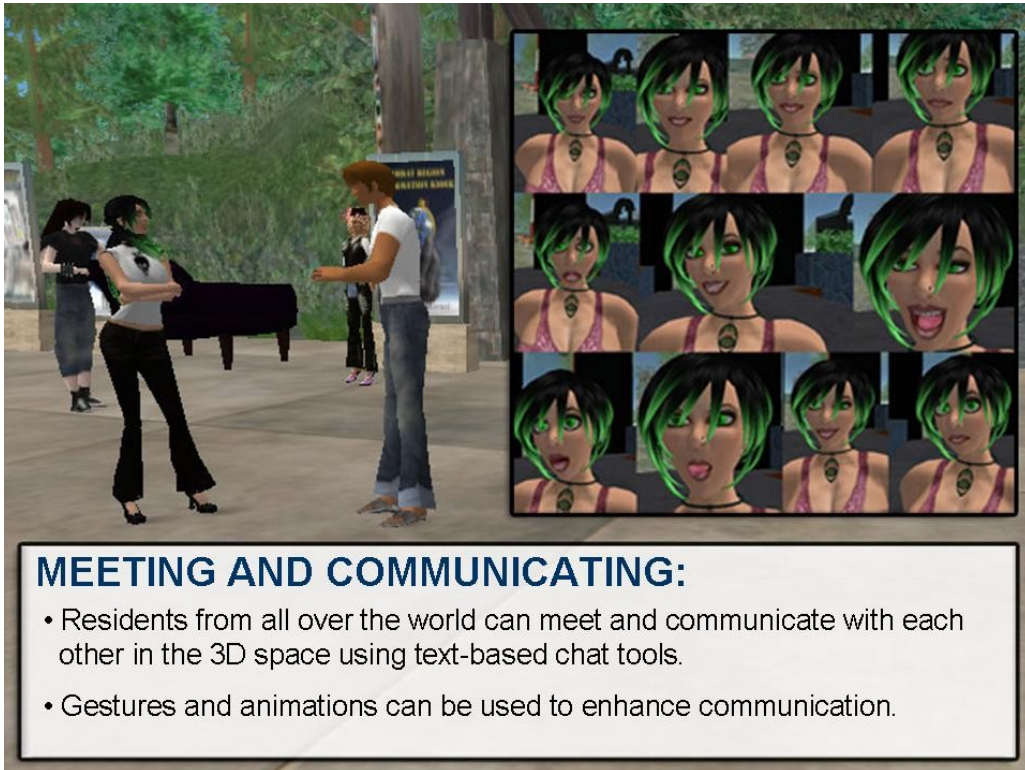
However, Second Life goes beyond a game, allowing residents to build and create their own environments; and interact with others from around the globe.

Second Life 'residents' are designing, conducting business, building relationships, entertaining, learning, and living their virtual lives.

FEATURES OF SECOND LIFE:

- Owned and operated by Linden Lab
- Second Life can be accessed free – users pay monthly fee to access some features.
- Users or 'residents' take on a character or 'avatar' to represent themselves 'in-world'.
- In-world economy: Residents buy & sell land, clothes, furniture etc.





CREATING OBJECTS & ENVIRONMENTS:

- Building tools which allow users to create almost anything they can imagine .
- Scripting tools to create complex objects including clothes, vehicles, toys, games etc.
- Allows for 100% user created environments





EXPLORING IDENTITY:

Customization of avatars – Second Life 'residents' can create highly detailed 'virtual selves'



REAL LIFE IN SECOND LIFE:

Real Life companies and other organisations are setting up virtual spaces, promotions and events within Second Life.

Reuters – a real life journalist is working to report on virtual events.

American Apparel – first real life store to open a virtual outlet selling virtual versions of their real life fashions.





**EXAMPLE -
EDUCATIONAL PLACES IN
SECOND LIFE:**

Campus: Second Life

Linden Labs supports a program focused on the use of Second Life for educational and "serious" applications.

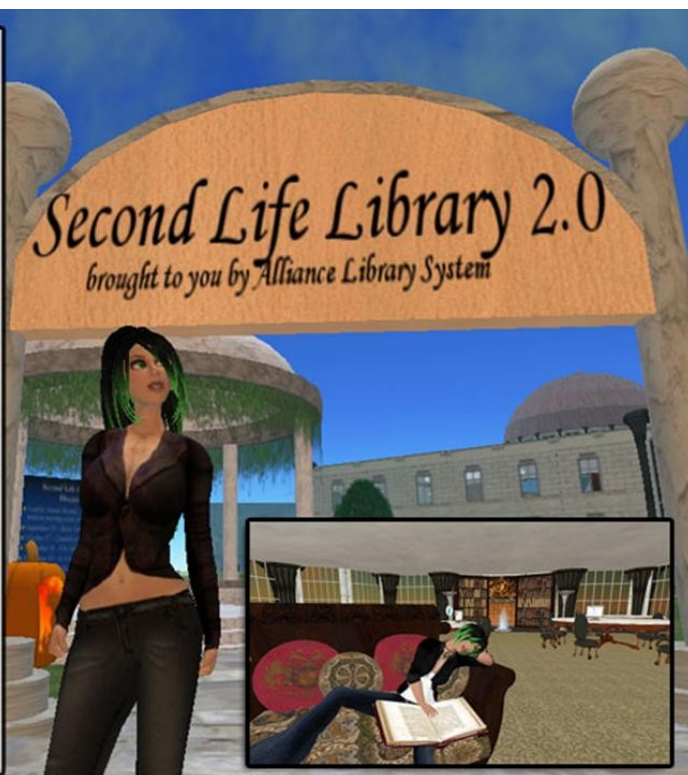
Campus: Second Life provides a hub for this community, as well as opportunities for teachers and students to trial projects in Second Life.

**EXAMPLE -
EDUCATIONAL PLACES
IN SECOND LIFE:**

Second Life Library 2.0

Aimed at extending
online library services
currently available
into virtual spaces.

Includes library
spaces, open-air
amphitheatre,
reference libraries,
displays and exhibits.







EXAMPLE – VIRTUAL EDU IN SECOND LIFE:

GIPPSTAFE: Paluma Resort

- Students and teachers creating & running a virtual resort
- Engaging students in an exciting learning activity
- Developing communication skills for the workplace and working effectively in teams.

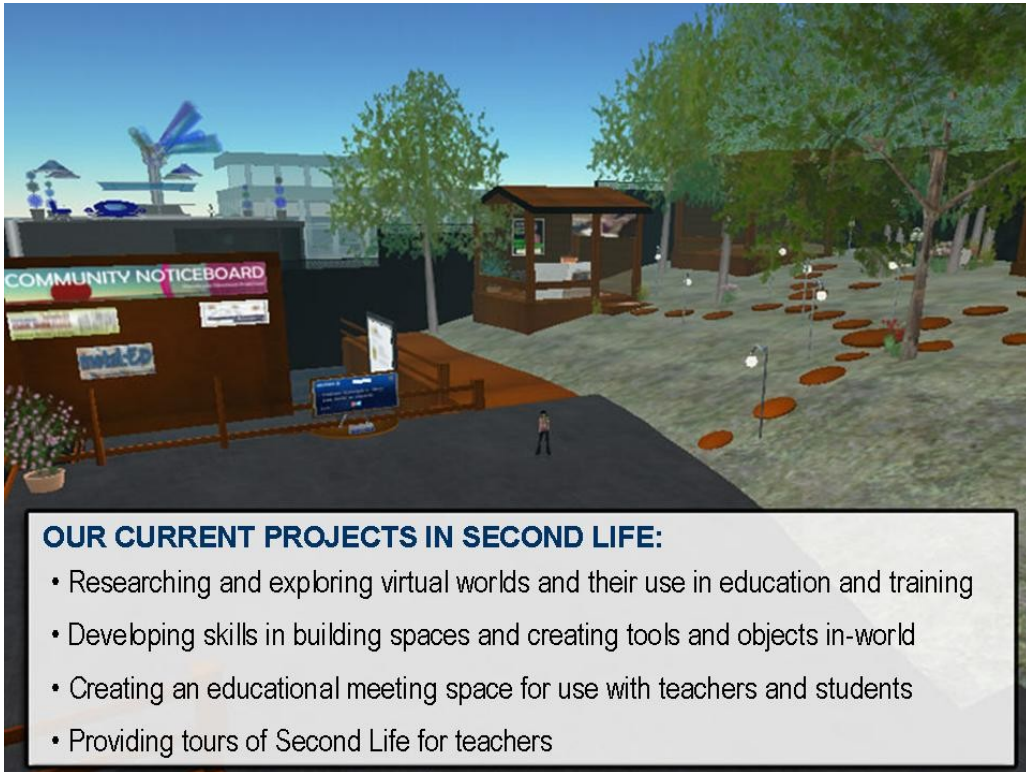
FLNW IN SECOND LIFE



Sharing Second Life with participants at the Future of Learning in a Networked World Open Space Conference with staff at Northtec, Whangarei, NZ.

Second Life Demo for Otago Polytechnic staff, Dunedin, NZ.





OUR CURRENT PROJECTS IN SECOND LIFE:

- Researching and exploring virtual worlds and their use in education and training
- Developing skills in building spaces and creating tools and objects in-world
- Creating an educational meeting space for use with teachers and students
- Providing tours of Second Life for teachers



LINKS & RESOURCES:

Second Life Website:
<http://secondlife.com>

SimTeach – Edu focussed Wiki:
<http://simteach.com/wiki>

Official Linden Blog:
<http://blog.secondlife.com>

New World Notes:
<http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn>

Jo Kay's Wiki:
<http://jokay.wikispaces.com>

Sean FitzGerald's Wiki:
<http://seanfitz.wikispaces.com>

Second Life Fotos by Jo Kay:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jokay>



Participatory Design and Scenarios in Learning – Teemu Leinonen

<http://flosse.dicole.org/?item=participatory-design-and-scenarios-in-learning>

Like all learning, also learning in a networked world, it can be designed. Design is an activity of planning and patterning actions toward a desired and foreseeable end. Design requires problem setting, investigation and problem solving - understanding context and systems where the designed solutions will be in use. When we design we may use a range of design methods.

Our product - learning in a networked world - is extremely complex and multi-dimensional. The "object" is a system with people in their psychological and social context, learning methods and practices, and physical and digital artifacts. Furthermore all these are carrying out with different historical-cultural burdens.

With this kind of "object" we must have a design process that relies on active communication in a community of different stakeholders. With the participants we must share our design tasks, defining design constraints and coordination of the work towards acceptable solutions. To carry out this kind of work, the design community has proposed the use of participatory design and scenario-based design processes.

Participatory design is not a strict discipline, but rather an approach and way of working and thinking. There is not a single definition of participatory design but there are several norms that are respected by the practitioners. These are, for an example:

- Respect of the people - they are the best experts of their own life and activities. They should be supported to have a voice in the design process.
- Knowing that the people are the primary course of innovation. The ideas emerge in collaboration with participants who are representing different stakeholders and backgrounds.
- Technology is always only one possible solution.
- Focus on systems. Systems are networks of people, their practices, technologies and artifacts embedded to the actions in a particular context.
- Spend time with the people.

<http://blip.tv/file/76798>

- Address problems with the people and affected parties.
- Be conscious of your own role in the process. Try to be a “reflective practitioner”.

(<http://lemill.org/trac/wiki/ParticipatoryDesign>)

In a participatory design process we may use scenarios. The scenarios are used to improve the communication among the participants. Scenarios can be used to illustrate and explain design problems, design constraints, and design solutions. Scenarios can be presented as a written story, drawing / storyboard, or as audio or a video.

Already making the scenario requires us to make a selection and to focus only on certain aspects. The “ready” scenario can then be used to open up the concepts for discussion among the participants. Making scenarios is an iterative process of tuning the story. With digital tools you may have many fast iterations.

There are obvious similarities with the participatory design and the paradigms of learning in a networked world. The new ideas of learning are often reliant on the social constructivist theory of learning that sees learning as a participation in social processes of knowledge construction. If we design learning according to principles of participatory design we actually are implementing something we want people to do when they are learning in a networked world.

A third practice, with similarities with the participatory design and the new paradigm of learning is the open source / free software development process. In open source development all the users are potential developers. They all have a voice.

We are all hackers: in participatory design, when learning in a networked world, and in an open/free software development.

“A typical hacker’s learning process starts out with setting up an interesting problem, working toward a solution by using various sources, then submitting the solution to extensive testing. Learning more about a subject becomes the hacker’s passion.”
(<http://www.pekkahimanen.org/>)

That Group Feeling – Stephen Downes

<http://halfanhour.blogspot.com/2006/10/that-group-feeling.html>

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<http://flickr.com/photos/teachandlearn/248660089/>

I still remember Vacation Bible School, at the Christian Reformed Church. I'd take an almost two hour bus ride each way, winding my way through the farm towns east of Ottawa until we arrived at the church on Russell Road. The lessons and the songs were OK, but the best was reserved for the noonhour.

That was when we all gathered in the field outside – it was the middle of summer, after all – and worked on our football team. We were the Water Buffalos and we had our team chant, "Hort! Hort! Hort!" We never played any other team, but instead spent the two or three weeks of the school scrimmaging among ourselves.

It was because of the Water Buffalos that I wanted to return, and I was disappointed to find that I would not

be welcome the following year. As I understood it, there was something about needing to actually be religious to go to VBS. It seemed unfair to me; I believed what I believed, and didn't believe what I didn't believe, and there wasn't much that was going to be done about that (my career as a Sunday School teacher met the same fate for the same reasons).

There were some intimations that were I to develop religion over the winter I would be welcome back, but they didn't press and I didn't change. I was about the age for summer camp by then, and soon the Water Buffalos were just a dim memory. But that group feeling never left me – nor the memory of the price I would have to pay to join.

It wasn't a big deal at the time, really. All through my school years I was in and out of religious denominations like a substitute running back. There was my time as an Anglican altar boy. My time as a Pentecostal evangelist (I even went to a church retreat in Peterborough with them, where I played – you guessed it – more football). I dabbled as a United and poked my head in the door of St. Catherine's. I still remember discussing the game with the priest as I was trick-or-treating one Halloween. "Football," he exclaimed. "It's the greatest game in the world." I didn't much like it, I said.

I never did pursue a football career but team sports remained for me – as they did for every Metcalfe boy, past and future, that ever lived – the cornerstone of my social life. Oh sure, there was the debating team and the chess club and the Reach For The Top team and even the drama club, but the only teams of consequence were the sports teams. This is why, 25 years later, when I attended my high school reunion, I found my life there wiped from existence. The true stars of my school were the tall blond athletic Dutch kids, the Vriends.

The less said about my history with teams in Metcalfe, probably, the better. The soccer team was particularly brutal. I was placed on it because I finished 4th in the school-wide three mile run (and once ran a mile in under five minutes – too bad we never had a track team). Nobody ever thought to ask why I was such a good runner; I was placed on the team for two years, never played a single minute, and was regularly roughed up by the rest of the team (the details of the shorts incident are best left out of a family column). Because I was the weakling, the runt. Because I was different.

Amazing that I persisted. Amazing that I showed up for every practice, every game, for two years, even when my shorts were ripped to shreds and my shoes had huge gaping holes in them. It was that time of life, I suppose, when I would risk anything to belong. To risk anything for that team feeling.

Happily, life is not the battleground that characterizes high school locker rooms, and I did eventually find fellowship and spirit. With the computer operations team at GSI, until new managers were imported from Texas and all our groups broken up. With radical leftist journalists at university, until I graduated and was sent to Edmonton. With various executives at the Graduate Students' Association, until the time came to move on. With, even, the e-learning group here in Moncton, until it was dismantled.

To belong. To move as one. To operate in synch, one purpose, one goal. I understand. I know, I have felt, the sense of belonging such a thing. The joining together. The feeling of being valued, of being vital. Part of the team. All for one and one for all. Oh I know, and honestly, still yearn for that team feeling. Despite the risks.

It's funny, though, how our emotions can cloud our other senses (I am told: first comes the thought, then come the emotions – but it's the emotions that spur to action, the emotions that give meaning and value – as Hume said, "Reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions").

While still a radical leftist journalist, I once did a fairly in depth exploration of a thing called the Hunger Project, and consequently, Erhard Seminars Training (EST). This beame a longer look at cults (and a great feature article) and a nice compliment to my knowledge of the logical fallacies, which I was also developing at the time. And what I discovered there seems to be the most natural thing in the world: how the desire to belong to a group is manipulated in order to subsume one's sense of individual identity, individual well-being, and even one's rationality and reason, in order to join the group.

Recent years have been bad years for cults. The memory of Jim Jones in Guyana was still fresh (and 'drinking the xxx Kool-Aid' has never left the lexicon). David Koresh would take down his Branch Davidians in a hail of explosions and gunfire, echoed a couple of years later by Timothy McVeigh. Then there were the Heaven's Gate suicides who thought they were traveling to space.

But there is nothing new to what these cults have been doing. We've all seen the movies that begin with the military boot camp experience. "First you break 'em down, then you build 'em up." Sensory and sleep deprivation. Being constantly on the move. Recitation of the group mantra. The suffering of hardship together. These bind a few loosely connected humans into a group – it works nearly every time, and if there are some misfits that need to be dealt with harshly, well, that simply gives the group something to bond over.

I've seen it over and over. The 'pods' we had in grade five (me, Jane, Brenda and Chris – we were the best, the brightest, and even had charts on our desks to record test 'victories'). Various Cub and Boy Scout troops and events – I still remember the triumphant entrance made by the other group after the overnight at camp Opemikon, the entrance of all six members of the group bearing a canoe that had been absolutely destroyed by the rapids. Lifelong memories, that.

We are – as critic after critic has reminded me since my 'network' talk – social animals. We are beings that not merely want, but need, to stick together. That is why we have families, religions, teams and nations.

And we are. For humans, being in a group is a survival tactic. Stand in the bush alone in the middle of the night (do it! I have) and you'll see what I mean. It's not simply that we feel isolated and vulnerable: we in fact are isolated and vulnerable. Most anything in that bush larger than a rabbit can both outrun and outfight us. Many things climb trees better than we do. And heaven help us should we run into hostile humans.

We need the group – we need it to survive, we need it at a deep and primitive level. And there's nothing wrong with that. Until...

There comes a certain point where our group identity becomes more of a burden than a blessing. Different people might draw this line at different points. Some draw the line at religious, ethnic and nationalist fanaticism, the sort of mass mania that can lead to fascism, war and mass murder. We all know the stories. Others draw the line at anti-social behaviour closer to home: the cults and the gangs, the terrorist organizations, the cartels and warlords, the motorcycle clubs.

So where is that dividing line? Where functional and healthy becomes dysfunctional, obviously. Somewhere between (most) football teams and the Symbionese Liberation Army. Somewhere between family bonding and wiping out your neighbours with machetes.

In my books, that line is the line between reason and emotion. To put it most simply, groups are based on passion while networks are based on reason. Groups meet our need to belong and to survive, while networks meet our need to connect and learn and to know. In a group, passion drowns out reason, in a network, reason drowns out passion. In places where passion and emotion should not prevail – when

building bridges, say, or launching space shuttles – groups should not prevail. In places where passion should prevail and is even an asset – in team sports, in family bonding - groups should prevail.

When we look at learning, therefore, and when we ask which model should prevail, the group model or the network model, we are asking fundamentally what the role of our educational system should be. Should it be to foster an emotional attachment to a group, be it a nation, religion, or system of wealth distribution?

This is not as straightforward a question as it may seem. Certainly, the attachment to a group plays a major role in religious education, whether the instruction be moderate or extreme. In the United States, students recite the Pledge of Allegiance, an explicit affirmation of the role of schools in forming an affiliation to a national entity. Schools may form around family groups, community groups, ethnic groups. There is no shortage of people wanting schooling to fulfill not only a learning but also a socialization function.

And this, then, is where passion in schooling begins to subsume reason. This, then, is where the teaching becomes less a matter of cognitive function and more a matter of indoctrination. Or call it what you will. But when the fostering of allegiance to a group becomes a major, or primary, function of education, then the traditional agenda, thought of as learning, is left behind.

To those that believe schools should foster good citizens (or soldiers, or Muslims, or factory workers) what is more important on graduation is not that the student can think, reason, learn and know, but whether the student is relevantly the same as the rest. The offering of standardized tests, far from fostering learning (and its worth noting that no amount of evidence on this front has swayed adherents even slightly), is intended to foster groups, group identity, and sameness – sameness of curriculum, sameness of the educational experience (if there are specifics to be learned, Disney, Fox and MSN can fill in the details later – what is important now is the receptivity).

The terrible danger of this is, as I allude above, that people will do anything, take any risk, in order to be part of the group. And those who for one reason or another fail to meet the group standard are dealt with harshly and sometimes brutally. How brutally? Well, consider the case of the homosexual in Wyoming, tortured and then hung on a fence, left to die. Consider the gang of young girls in Vancouver ganging up on and killing a member or their class. Consider the violence exerted on students at Canadian residential school against First Nation students who are to speak in their own language.

There was a time, when wild animals were a genuine threat and when tribes would raid, enslave and kill each other, that this aspect of learning played an essential role. But today, it threatens us all.

We can no longer afford dogmatic tribalism. That is not to say we can no longer afford groups – we want to continue to have sports teams and families and friends. But in matters affecting economics and finance, environment, government and nations, we can no longer afford group-based tribalism. The implications of subsuming reason to emotion in a complex society should be apparent.

They should be apparent at a national and international level, where the prevalence of group identity has led to disasters like the second world war, the Cultural Revolution, and the genocide in Rwanda (to name only a few). Where the subsumption of reason to emotion and passion has led to widespread beliefs in fictions – the continued resistance to measures to combat global warming, the rise of religious fanaticism and terrorism, the sanctioning of torture by national governments. These are not political issues: they are a headlong clash between people who identify most strongly with their particular group, and people who look at society as a whole, between people whose beliefs are based on emotion, and people whose beliefs are based on reason.

It seems clear to me that in endeavours where we, as a society, would prefer reason to prevail over emotions, we should prefer to organize ourselves as networks rather than as groups. It seems additionally to be clear to me that education is probably one of the most critical areas where this needs to be the case, as it will be necessary for citizens of the future to be able to respond to an increasing set of global crises from a ground of reason, rather than emotional attachment to a group.

I want groups to continue to exist. I want that feeling of unrestrainedly shouting "Hort! Hort! Hort!" in a suburban field, of forming a bond with a group of friends, of feeling the strength and support of my community and my family. But not at any cost. Not at the cost groups, unrestrained, can inflict on the outcast. Not at the cost that indoctrination, practiced as a theory of learning, can inflict on a society and on a planet. Not at the cost the tribe mentality, as exercised in the schoolyard, can inflict on an individual.



<http://flickr.com/photos/bee/255351543/>

Comments to That Group Feeling

Artichoke said...

This is beautifully captured Stephen, perfect ...

And sometimes the "wild duck" has an impact on the group

"When the wild ducks migrate in their season, a strange tide rises in the territories over which they sweep. As if magnetised by the great triangular flight, the barnyard fowl leap a foot or two into the air and try to fly. ... All the ducks on the farm are transformed for an instant into migrant birds, and into those hard little heads, until now filled with humble images of pools and worms and barnyards, there swims a sense of the continental expanse, of the breadth of seas and the salt taste of the ocean wind. The duck totters to the right and left in its wire enclosure, gripped by a sudden passion to perform the impossible and a sudden love whose object is a mystery ... The barnyard duck had no notion that its little head was big enough to contain oceans, continents, skies; but of a sudden it was beating its wings, despising corn, despising worms, battling to become a wild duck." Antoine de Saint-Exupery's (1995) *Wind, Sand and Stars*

Leigh Blackall said...

yes, a near perfect post, including a perfect first comment Arti. So, is it enough to be satisfied with wild ducks pointing out the escape roots in the holding pens that will enable barn ducks to fly? How can we balance the emotional need for the group (hort hort hort) and the reason for the individual. Is it enough to simply be aware of the potential tyranny in groups? I guess that's all we can achieve - awareness. Thanks Stephen. I'm a barn duck trying to fly, but at times its hard to keep up, and I yearn for the barn again.

Steven Parker said...

Great post Stephen I will admit to investing alot of emotional energy in the value of the idea/concept of networkedlearning, to remain professionally relevant as an educationalist; by that I mean having skills to manage technology network with my peers remain digitally and information literate employ critical thinking and remain objective passing on the good stuff to my colleagues and students.

I have to admit the personal language of a group that inevitably reveals itself within social networks does not appeal to me (a turnoff) but accept that it goes with the territory of human bonds and connections within a social context. to put precendence on objective focused communication resonates more for me personally within a professional group/network context, for me emotive communication can be a turnoff to tuning in to the conversation potentially missing out on something useful...for me I appreciate the emotive voice more in an individual's blog not in the group/ network...

Anne Paterson said...

I think that although reason prevails in a network, the networks are made of individuals, those individuals are

emotive, the individuals in the network become impassioned. The network doesn't necessarily have the drawbacks of the "Group at any risk" concept, but it has advantages in momentum to gain if enthused with passion and some common understandings like tolerance, being unselfconscious and taking risks in teaching and learning. I don't think common understandings make you a group, but I do think passion and emotion can sit next to reason.

I think the personal experience, speaking in a personal voice and passion and not being self-conscious are the attributes needed to teach and learn today. Sparker I see the emotive voice as a turn on in learning and seeing the world, not a turn off. The emotions are important in interpreting the ideas.

Those speakers on the recent FLNW tour were a network of passionate individuals who have expanded the wingspan of Networked Learning ideas in their practice.

The broad networking capability of social software has impacted on how we talk to each other. It means that I can reflect and participate here, right on Stephens blog. I am demonstrating an unselfconsciousness in revealing what I think and know or not know. I am motivated to participate and therefore learn. If I thought I had to impart pearls of wisdom everytime I am motivated to participate and learn, I am sure I would not participate.

I will talk more about these things on my new blog at www.participatecontributelearn.blogspot.com.au where I am working on learning how to apply all the things I am learning.

Steven Parker said...

Emotive communication makes more sense to me in the context of a personal blog for example, one of the reasons I like video blogging is that my emotions and body language become more apparent in my communication for example

Stephen's point in the context of networked communication resonates with me:

'it will be necessary for citizens of the future to be able to respond to an increasing set of global crises from a ground of reason'

It occurs to me emotive language can potentially distract from the latent potential of a network 'to respond to an increasing set of global crises from a ground of reason.' with the possible alienation of those people freshly exposed to a network who may feel no affiliation to the emotive language.

Personally I like the idea of respecting the language and tone of a networked conversation by that I mean being dispassionate to a point (objective), the language of an individual's blog as being emotive and 'True' (subjective)

There is no black and white differentiation on communication style within a network that can be advocated...

Anne Paterson said...

Individuals are the network. Individuals are not dispassionate even if a dispassionate language and tone is used. I really believe we need to be more personal and less dispassionate to connect. Being personal does

not take away from reason - it just means hearing and seeing the other person. I take your point about videoblogging!

Ulisēs³¹ said...

I'm not comfortable with the dichotomy you draw between emotions and reason. I think people can get too "emotionally" invested in that distinction. Without emotion, there is no empathy. Without empathy, you assume that there cannot be personal ethics, which means you have to encode ethics in the form of laws. From that, it's a short step to limiting people's freedom, which both groups and networks are quite capable of doing.

Meanwhile, here I was constructing a critique of networks³²!

31 <http://www.blogger.com/profile/1387527>

32 http://ideant.typepad.com/ideant/2006/10/the_tyanny_of_.html

Autonomy – Stephen Downes

<http://halfanhour.blogspot.com/2006/10/autonomy.html>

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<http://flickr.com/photos/mobology/268165587/>

I think that people misunderstand what I mean by autonomy. It's like when I talk about learner-designed learning. People seem to assume I am talking about casting learners unaided into the sea to fend for themselves. As though they could never ask for advice. As though there would never be anyone willing to guide them or support them.

The same with autonomy. The presumption is that what I mean is a person who is an island, who does not depend in any way on others, who is ruggedly individualistic. Some sort of weird Ayn Rand fantasy of epistemological superhumans, a Nietzsche-inspired fantasy about people being able to completely determine, with no input from anyone or anything, what is true, what is right, what is good.

But that's not what I mean at all. Nothing close. That's why I have included openness and connectedness as additional criteria for epistemic goodness. That's why I talk about communities and networks at all. I do believe that the contributions of other people are important and essential. I am well aware how much external influences - yes, including media and advertising - can and should help determine our thoughts and beliefs. I would even draw you a picture depicting the causal relationships, how sensations effect neural states.

For one thing, maintaining an opposite point of view is irrational. Given what we know of human cognition, there are no belief states that are completely independent of our experiences. We are not born (contra Descartes and a whole school of misled Rationalists) with ideas burned into our brain, like some sort of mark of the Creator. What we come to believe is caused by what we experience. Our mental contents are reflections, perceptual echoes, the materials of our experiences playing back against each other, mixing and mashing and reforming.

In just the same way, contrasting autonomy with determinism is irrational. When I say that somebody's contribution to a network was 'not autonomous', I do not mean that they are under some sort of mind control, a robot at the whim of some Svengali. Yes, again, it is true that all mental states are caused by perceptions and experiences. But it does not follow (and should not be inferred) that all mental states are determined by these perceptions and experiences.

These sorts of extremes - complete independence, and complete dependence - are the result of what I might call a naive causal view of the world. This is the view (that all of us were taught as children) that the world operates like clockwork. That when you do something, there is a knowable and determinate effect. A causes B. And if there is a B, then there must be some determinate A that caused it. But the world isn't like that. Once events reach a certain level of complexity, the story about causation breaks down.

Consider, for example, a bolt of lightning. We have all (I presume) seen lightning, and know that it occurs during a thunderstorm. We are told that the cause of the lightning is the buildup of electrical charge in the thundercloud. The thundercloud, in turn, is caused by the buildup of water droplets in the air, condensation caused by the interaction of a warm and humid air mass with a cold front, this cold front in turn caused by the rotation of the Earth and the uneven heating of the Sun.

I remember once, one hot July night in Edmonton, returning home from the Power Plant, mad at the world and just wanting to get away, I saw the lightning flashing south of the city and jumped into my car to go chase it. A couple hours later I was out on the flat prairie, the lightning bolts shooting straight down, huge, towering, overwhelming bolts from the sky. I got out of my car and walked around the field, feeling the rain pelt against my face, watching the bolts streak down, one after the other, feeling so terrified by the storm I was at the same time one with it, part of it.

And I asked myself, had I been struck by lightning at that point, what would have been the cause of it? Would it have been the dismissive behaviour of those around me in the bar? Would it have been some irrational perception on my part? Would it have been my foolish walk around the field in a thunderstorm? Would it have been the buildup of an electrical charge in a cloud? Would it have been the uneven heating of

the Earth by the Sun? What would have caused that bolt to have that impact at that time? And the answer is: nothing. That when we say this thing caused that thing we are placing an interpretation, based on some gross oversimplification, on the state of affairs.

There is no contradiction between saying that our thoughts and experiences are caused, and saying that we make choices. This becomes especially the case when we see that our choices in turn result in new thoughts and experiences. What we are is that entity (that amorphous assemblage of neural connections that, when thought of as a unit, can be seen as recognizing input and creating output) that recognizes certain states of affairs as states of affairs - as things, as causes, as Herman from next door.

So when I am talking about one thing being autonomous from others, I am not talking about the one thing being free from the causal influence of others, but rather, I am telling a story about how it is that the input of that one thing to the network as a whole is determined, and more accurately, how it should be seen as determined, how it should be regarded as determined, how - were we building a network of some sort - it should be enabled or permitted to be determined. When I say something is 'determined' or 'not determined' I am talking about, not some essential state of nature, where all things are one of These or one of Those, but rather, how we should consider that thing to be.

What was the cause of the lightning? If it was determined, then something made it strike at that time in that place. If it was undetermined, then the storm decided to hurl a lightning bolt at that time (neither wording really satisfies - and yet these are the words we have to work with, because our bias toward a naive causal view of the world is built into the language). What I want us to do, with respect to humans, is to take the attitude that the storm decided to hurl the lightning bolt. Not as an uncaused completely indeterminate event (because obviously it's not) but rather, seen this way, as a grounded, meaningful event (indeed, the source of meaning).

What does that mean in practice? It means that we ascribe to ourselves the possibility of choice (in fact, Gestalt alternatives, oscillating ways of seeing the world, the decision to perceive a duck rather than a rabbit), that this choice will be ascribed as the cause of our external actions, including especially our contributions to the network, in the sense that "When I say 'A' it is me that is saying 'A', and not some other person saying 'A' through me." In other words, we are saying that we see the origin of 'A' as being located inside ourselves rather than external to ourselves. It would be like saying that the cause of the lightning bolt is in the storm - it isn't some direct consequence of warm and cold air masses, and it wasn't in some sense 'drawn out' by some foolish person walking in a field tempting fate.

What this means in practice is that there ought not be an identifiable dependence (that is, an explainable correlation) between what someone else says or does, and what you say or do.

Think of it as akin to the distinction between being told to do something, and having someone suggest that you do something. These two circumstances may be perceptually indistinct. In each case, a person leans over to you and says, say, "You should vote no." And then you utter the words, "I vote no." The difference between the two states is one of interpretation, one where we decide as observers or as participants to apply one frame to it, as opposed to another. The difference between thinking to ourselves, on hearing the words, 'I have no choice' as opposed to 'I have a choice'.

In order for it to be possible for a person to rationally say that 'I have a choice' there must, in fact, be a choice. It much be possible for the person to have uttered some statement other than the one that was suggested. This implies, first, that some sort of consideration or processing of the suggestion occurs, and

second, that as part of that consideration, alternative actions emerge as genuine possibilities. So that you could, as a rational person, see two possible and acceptable states of affairs, one where you said 'I vote no' and one where you said 'I vote yes' (and even one where you decline to vote at all).

What would prevent you from having that choice? First, your input might be in some way circumvented. For example, when somebody purports to express your vote for you, but substitutes their own point of view for yours. Second, your input might be coerced. For example, when the consequences of uttering 'I vote yes' are so horrible that it cannot be considered as a viable alternative. Third, you might fail to consider or process the request. For example, you may respond automatically because you have been conditioned or hypnotized in some way.



<http://flickr.com/photos/teachandlearn/251809256/>

Now again, it is important to keep in mind, what these scenarios describe are ways of seeing a situation, as opposed to three ontologically distinct types of entities. This is not some sort of taxonomy that I am offering (I don't offer taxonomies). These are three vectors you can consider to be more or less the case such that, when the preponderance of the interpretation is in one direction, the choice was non-autonomous, and when

the preponderance of the interpretation is in the other direction, we say the choice was autonomous.

And these vectors are very much matters of point of view. To take the most obvious case, what constitutes 'so horrible that it cannot be considered as a viable alternative'? This clearly will vary depending on the person's point of view. Some people may be prepared to tolerate anything but death or dismemberment. Others would not fear the same being done to themselves, but will fold at the thought of it happening to a loved one. Others would not consider expulsion or exclusion by a group to be tolerable. Being singled out as the lone dissenter might be unbearable for some. This circumstance - what counts as too horrible - is a matter of interpretation.

So when a person, acting as a node in a network, wishes to participate autonomously in a network, what this means is that this person would prefer that, on the whole, (a) their utterances be expressed to other members of the network accurately, (b) that there not be sanctions or punishments for making certain utterances, and (c) they be afforded the time and the capacity to consider matters in their own light before making an utterance.

So when a person, building or designing a network, wishes the participants to participate autonomously, what this means is that they would tend to (a) ensure each member's voice is communicated accurately and completely, (b) create a space or mechanism for that person such that they are shielded from sanctions or retributions, and (c) ensure they are presented with information in a timely manner and given the tools (including the education and the background knowledge necessary) to make informed decisions.

These considerations explain why I tend to disfavour small groups. See also Konrad Glogowski, 'To Ungroup a Class'³³. Small groups tend to fail on all three counts. First, when the decision of a group is reported, the view expressed is often the reporter's (and there are no mechanisms in place to prevent that). Second, for some people (namely, me) small groups create greater pressure to conform (especially when the group is given a task to perform or an outcome to produce). And third, the process is often constructed in such a way as to prevent consideration of the matter at hand - wither there is no time to present such considerations, or the considerations are overwhelmed by group members who have not taken the time to consider.

I haven't talked here about why autonomy is necessary in well-functioning networks. The long story is probably the subject for another day. But in a nutshell, the response is this: better decisions are made when more perspectives and more variables are taken into account. Each person in a network brings new perspectives and variables to the table. This, increasing the number of people in the network improves the functioning of the network. If, however, their participation is not autonomous, then the impact of those perspectives and variables are never brought into play. They are overridden by whatever entity is creating the non-autonomous behavior. This weakens the network, because of the missing perspective, and worse, it disguises this weakening because the individual entity may be perceived as autonomous, even when not.

33 <http://www.teachandlearn.ca/blog/2006/10/03/to-ungroup-a-class/>

Groups and/or networks... the future of learning in a networked world – Leigh Blackall

<http://teachandlearnonline.blogspot.com/2006/09/groups-andor-networks-future-of.html>



<http://flickr.com/photos/leighblackall/251036044/>

Home from the FLNW tour and man! am I tired.

The picture to the left represents one of the most significant realisations for me on the tour.

A realisation to do with ideas of groups, class, networks, individualism, and connectedness.

Right from the start, Stephen Downes objected to being expected to participate in the group. It wasn't the participation that was the issue, it was the expectation. That there is an important thing to point out, it is the seed of something significant in what a future for learning could be, if we manage to understand the notion of network.

Of course, it was easy to take offense at Stephen's resistance to participate, it seemed out right rude not to join the group, but that's because I wasn't seeing what he was trying to say. By objecting to the expectation, I felt as though he was objecting to participate. That wasn't so. Stephen was resisting the formation of a group, arguing that it is the group that prevents individual connectedness. Are you confused? I sure was, and so were many others. But I've come to realise that this is a very important point Stephen was trying to make. I think it is well illustrated by the photo. Because of the obligation to the group, individual connections can too easily be over looked.

The day after that photo was taken, we went to Auckland to meet people at the University of Technology. It was there, where I spread myself thinly across an even larger group, that Stephen moved to the side and drew this diagram. It was the first time that he had taken the time to represent his thoughts and actions on the issue, and the first time I took the time to properly consider it.



http://www.flickr.com/photos/stephen_downes/252157734/

I helped Stephen to video record his explanation of this diagram³⁴. In it he attempts to clarify his objections by defining what he sees as the make up of a group, and how that differs importantly from a network. A group demands unity, where a network requires diversity. A group requires coordination, where a network is autonomous. A group is by its nature closed, where a network is open. The information in a group is distributed, where in a network it is in the connections...

34 <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-4126240905912531540&hl=en>



But what do I get out of this?

I get a realisation that it is very difficult to properly understand networks, let alone achieve a true network in face to face

settings. Even though an open space meeting brings us close, there are still so many aspects of the face to face meeting that can too easily lead us into forming groups, at the expense of the individual connectedness we can experience online.

So it makes it even clearer now, how political the Internet is, and how challenging it can be to established power. I go back to my place of paid work now, a place with almost ancient power rules and very defined groups, with a clearer picture of what needs to occur. My next post will be the vision I have for my organisation, to make way for future learning AND a networked world.

Comments to Groups and/or networks... the future of learning in a networked world

Artichoke said...

Fascinating post Leigh - to challenge, and undermine our own thinking is probably impossible - we need an external agent to catalyse and provoke us - is only then that our internal inconsistencies are exposed.

Have so enjoyed tracking your conversations and thinking through the FLNW emails BUT most especially the thinking that has come out of Stephen's whiteboard sketching.

35 <http://teachandlearnonline.blogspot.com/2005/08/more-on-edna-groups-vs-open-network.html>

36 <http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/page.cgi?post=35885>

Am reading Alexander Sidorkin's PhD dissertation -An ontological understanding of dialogue in education - as a result of a presentation at ULearn06 and reckon that Stephen's thinking about groups and networks allows us to better understand her metaphor for learning - in Chapter 3: Three drinks theory: Types of discourse in classroom communication - be interested in your thinking on this one

Graham Wegner³⁷ said...

Leigh, trying to pick my way through the threads of conversations recorded in podcasts and blip.tv grabs, reading the email list, the blog and the wiki has been engaging, challenging and bloody hard to make sense of as well!! Well done on pushing the boundaries - I know as I read and listen more to the captured results of your unconference, I'll be coming back to this blog to clarify your ideas, the group's ideas and the networked individual's ideas so that they make sense to me. Would have loved to have been there but consider me a networked tendrill leeching a fair bit of learning from the whole FLNW venture. I still have to listen to Stephen's podcast before I fully understand what you are outlining here - anyway, well done to all involved. The Global Summit might feel a bit traditional after your last fortnight!

Stephen Downes said...

Well I think a prison riot would feel traditional after the last two weeks.

It was still worth doing, though, and this post (even with the photograph, which makes me look like some kind of demented Buddha figure) explains why.

I think that the difference between you and me, in this respect, is that I couldn't return to the logic of groups, while you could and therefore did.

I'm not sure whether to thank you for that. ;) But I will grant you this - you have facilitated an experience that I, for one, will never forget.

p.s. I too have photos and video, etc., which I wasn't able to upload during the event. Watch for stuff tagged 'flnw' on Blip and Flickr and, for the audio, Odeo?

37 <http://gwegner.edublogs.org/>

Groups, networks and ecological thinking – Stanley Frielick

<http://www.flexilearn.com/?p=4#more-4>

Been taking a break from work to recharge after a hectic few weeks - and letting the ongoing discussion about groups, networks and the future of learning wash over me, reading all the posts, but having a more private inner dialogue. The challenge that all of this is posing for me is how to make my own ecological thinking more accessible - more in the 'network' rather than the 'group' as Stephen would suggest. Although I'm still not clear exactly what the differences are when those terms are used. Like Teemu I think there is a lot of confusion in the FLNW debate about "group learning vs network learning, formal learning vs informal learning", but I also think that Stephen, Leigh, Mark and the other many contributors are debating something very important for the future of learning - although it should be rephrased as the future of learning in institutions.

Or more simply, the FLNW tour and ensuing debate is actually about the future of learning institutions in a networked world. In my view 'learning', or the biological process of transforming information into knowledge, is a constant in the ecological activity of the planet, and isn't really going to change its nature with the advent of a new technology or modes of engagement for learners. What will change however, is the obsolete institutional form that evolved in response to specific historical circumstances, economic imperatives, and technological affordances. The exemplar institution here is the university, and the form is specifically the 17th-century dualistic way of thinking that is embedded in the very fabric of the institution.

When I posted about the way I saw the non-difference between groups and networks (an excerpt from which Stephen cited in his eFest keynote) I was trying to point out that networks are aggregates of groups, in the same way that an ecosystem is composed of many interacting sub-systems. I suggested that the important distinction is between closed and open learning environments - "not that 'elearning 1.0 = groups (=bad?)' and 'elearning 2.0 = networks (=good?)', but rather that (good) education has always been a synthesis of both 'closed' and 'open' learning. The advent of the internet doesn't necessarily change that. It does disrupt obsolete practices, open up new spaces and approaches, flatten the hierarchies - but it's not the panacea for all our educational ills. As novices we learn mainly by imitation - copying moves, styles, gestures, ways of seeing and thinking - in 'closed' environments (groups, classes, courses, multiple-choice questions, the 5-yr old kindy class) and gradually acquire competence and mastery through a dialectical movement into 'open' learning. The word 'education' itself has its Latin roots in a dialectic of educere/educare - to instill and to lead out. Like evolution, it's both a conserving and subversive activity. Being free doesn't mean submitting to authority, but rather having the authority and ability to respond - to know when, why and how to act appropriately, to respect other cultures.... I think Dreyfus is saying that this kind of intellectual, emotional and spiritual maturity cannot be acquired solely on the internet"

So for me the question (and the challenge) is not about the differences between groups and networks - but rather, how do we transform our (largely 'closed') learning institutions into more 'open' learning environments ? I've been pursuing this question for about the last 25 years - first as a newbie schoolteacher and then later as an academic in the university... all along concerned with ecological thinking or what Capra calls the theory of living systems - especially the implications for education and learning.

However having spent some time now at downes.ca I'm realising that what I call an ecological approach to learning/teaching is resonant in many ways with what Stephen calls the network way or George Siemens calls connectivism. My problem is that my writings and workshops on the subject are nowhere near as 'networked' as theirs are. Probably because for most of my career I worked as a traditional academic in relatively 'closed' circles of discipline groups, professional bodies, journals, conferences, etc. This academic apparatus is becoming more 'open' but it is another outcome of the FLNW conference for me, that I will continue to pursue and flesh out what I mean by 'ecological thinking' or 'eco-logic' in this blog and other 'network' genres of media and expression. In the meantime there is about 80,000 words on the topic of an ecological approach to learning/teaching here³⁸ - but I'm under no illusions that anyone is actually going to read the whole thing. But if you want a more digestible, 'network' version please continue to check back at Flexilearn over the next few months.

Comments to Groups, networks and ecological thinking

Leigh Blackall

There's no doubt about it Stanley, reading you here as apposed to in a group is very different. Your writing for yourself first, and for we readers second, and we readers could be anyone... naturally this changes the approach you would take in articulating a thought, taking care to reference and paraphrase... and I the reader come to it differently as well - in this case without the flaming you endure from some in the group.

And quite right I think future of institutionalised learning indeed... but to comprehend that, we first have to understand and appreciate where and how learning is happening these days...

Nice post.

Stanley Frielick

Thanks Leigh for the comments. I'm beginning to see the value of a 'networked' way with blogs, shaking off that academic rust :)

I have been reading your posts about the umbrellas and rain - will respond soon (the 'real' world is very intrusive at the moment :)

38 <http://northnet.northland.ac.nz/community/course/view.php?id=16>

Against Grand Narratives – Konrad Glogowski

<http://www.teachandlearn.ca/blog/2006/09/22/against-grand-narratives/>



<http://flickr.com/photos/teachandlearn/256835460/>

I'm probably the only one of the FLNW crew who has not yet posted anything on The Future of Learning in a Networked World conference that is currently taking place in New Zealand. So, here it is.

We started on Monday, September 18th in Dunedin where we spent quite a bit of time engaging with educators at the Otago Polytechnic and the University of Otago. Then, we flew to Christchurch for a one-day session at the Christchurch College of Education, and are currently discussing online communities, virtual worlds, and organizational change at NorthTec in Whangarei, just north of Auckland. In short, we're having a great time discussing all aspects of learning in a networked world.

One of the most appealing and meaningful aspects of the conference is its focus on individuals. Wherever we travel, we are given opportunities to discuss the new nature of learning with teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and e-learning enthusiasts - with people who genuinely care about learning and want to

make a difference. The conference also gives all of us an opportunity to learn from each other. I have already spoken to Jo about using Second Life in elementary education, to Sean and Steven about developing online communities of practice, to Barbara about setting up online class projects with her students in Sao Paulo, and to Teemu about meaningful applications of LeMill (which I will address in a separate post upon my return to Toronto). I am very fortunate to be surrounded by so much talent.

The people I travel with and all the individuals that we meet remind me that, as educators, we don't often focus on meaningful conversations and tend to privilege plot over characterization - we focus on grand narratives and not specific human stories. For the first few years of my teaching career my methodology was based on the notion that, whatever the topic, the students must learn as much as possible about its causes and its development. When we talked about World War II, for example, I never focused on Hitler, Mussolini, Hirohito, Stalin, or Chamberlain. In short, I never focused on fascinating individuals who could have made the study of history interesting. Instead, we looked at timelines and causes. When we studied Elizabethan drama, I focused on its principal characteristics and key playwrights. I spent hours focusing on the Globe Theatre and, while I used the biographies of Shakespeare and Marlowe, we never discussed these figures as people, as individuals who had colourful lives and interesting personalities. Instead, we discussed them only as literary figures - people of genius whose work is highly complex and meant to be carefully analyzed. Teaching complex historical issues was always reduced to recounting key events. In my search for grand narratives, I forgot about interesting individuals whose lives enrich these narratives. While we had many class discussions, they never helped my students enter the complex world of our curriculum. Instead, the students observed and analyzed from a distance. Learning was reduced to memorizing a collection of static objects, it was not a conversation that the students could enter as participants.

The conversations that are happening here in New Zealand remind me that this tendency to favour the plot is very limiting in the classroom setting and in life in general. Whenever I talk to educators about learning in a networked world, I am reminded of the words of Donald Graves³⁹ who so accurately captures our tendency to focus on facts and figures, on timelines and key events:

We sit in our living rooms, clicking the television remote control as we search for an engaging story. Inside the classroom, reading discussions center on recounting events. In history or social studies, we focus on the chronology of the causes of the Civil War. We're missing the focus on people and their wants - the desires and conflicts that create the plots and cause the wars. Bypass the scientists and their decision-making processes and we don't learn how scientists think. Worse, we bypass students when we fail to focus on the people who can teach them (Graves, 2000).

When he refers to "people who can teach them," Graves of course means people who made history and whose lives offer an insightful glimpse into complex events of our collective past. In other words, Graves suggests that we move away from grand narratives and offer our students meaningful points of entry. Grand narratives are not very effective in education because they alienate learners. They are meant to be admired and analyzed and will always remain distant artifacts. What we need to do instead is help learners navigate their own paths through learning and that can best be accomplished by giving them opportunities to find

39 <http://books.heinemann.com/authors/998.aspx>

meaningful points of entry. A history lesson on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for example, could begin by discussing this picture. A lesson on democracy could begin with a class discussion of this picture. These are valuable and meaningful points of entry that emphasize the richness and complexity of human lives. Unlike timelines and key events, they do not prevent our students from tapping into the world where their lives can meaningfully intersect with the lives of interesting people.

I consider myself very fortunate to be here in New Zealand to participate in the FLNW Conference because I am reminded every day that I am here to engage with individuals who are passionate about their work and who have been inspiring me ever since I landed in Dunedin on Monday morning. Some might argue that our travels around New Zealand amount to a grand narrative, that we are privileging plot over characterization. The truth is that everyone we meet, everyone we talk to, becomes absorbed into the dynamic of a community of learners where we can address individual stories and challenges, where we can have discussions and move away from presenting carefully prepared PowerPoint presentations.

Case in point: (This was written at the Otago Museum on Wednesday, September 20).

Barbara, Rose, Steven, Jo, Teemu, Sean, Arti, Leigh and I are now sitting in the cafe at the Otago Museum conversing about education, learning, professional development, and the nature of this conference. There are no carefully prepared speeches, there are no definitive, conclusive statements about any of these topics. Instead, the ideas emerge and float around. We pull them into our discussions, we consider them, we share ideas, and the result, while certainly intangible, is exceptionally inspiring. We are learning. We are immersed in informal yet highly empowering discussions. When I return to Canada, I will not be able to show my colleagues any tangible outcomes of this conference. I will not have a book of conference proceedings. Instead, I will arrive back in Canada convinced that the best way to develop as a professional and a person is to surround myself with people who care and who are passionate about education.

Thanks, Leigh, for organizing this conference and giving us time to talk.

Education and ecstasy – Stanley Frielick

<http://www.flexilearn.com/?p=5#more-5>

Suddenly he saw the city as a vast network of thoughts The universities were places for self-perfection, places for the highest education in life. Everyone taught everyone else. All were teachers, all were students. The sages listened more than they talked; and when they talked it was to ask questions that would engage endless generations in profound and perpetual discovery.

Ben Okri - Astonishing the Gods

Although it's a gross oversimplification (and I'm sure that all the different perspectives, nuances and complexities will emerge as the FLNW book takes shape) - it seems to me that one dominant theme runs through the debates on the Google group. I've identified this as the future of learning institutions in a networked world. There seem to be two main threads:

1. e-learning 2.0 or the 'network way' is the future of learning - we will all 'learn' by using web 2.0 tools and linking our personal learning environments to others in a complex ecology of connected nodes. The traditional role of the teacher as the transmitter of knowledge is over. We are all equal - no more groups, no more unequal power relations, no more hierarchies. There is no need for the structures and constraints of schools and universities as we know them - indeed, the network way is rapidly dissolving them. You can get education direct from the 'teacher' and assessment is an optional extra - when you want a qualification. We will all pursue our individual learning desires unhindered by institutional constraints of curriculum and timetable. A Catholic school in Australia is hailed as the exemplar of this new approach⁴⁰. Stephen has just posted a comprehensive philosophical basis⁴¹ for this which I haven't had time to read properly yet.

2. Institutions will still be around for the foreseeable future, but is possible to incorporate the innovative features of e-learning 2.0 into institutional practices. But instead of focusing on the cool new tools, widgets and network hype, we should more think about the process of learning and whether the new modes are actually effective for learners across different fields of knowledge. Teachers will still be needed to model values and guide development, culture will still be created in groups or communities, and the institutions will continue to play an important role in the accreditation, funding, and quality of learning.

I tend towards the latter view but I don't see the threads as oppositional - rather as the two endpoints on a continuum of 'closed - open' learning environments. In this post I want to situate the 'network way' and its emphasis on connectedness and ecology within a broader context of educational history and theory:

"In hindsight there is nothing significantly new about an ecological view of teaching/learning. There is a centuries-old tradition of holistic or whole-person education □ an underground stream as it were which bubbles up from time to time to disturb the positivist complacency of the techno-rational classroom. This holistic tradition is the educational counterpart of the Romantic movement (William Blake, Samuel Coleridge, etc.) that arose in response to the materialist worldview of 18th century Enlightenment thought. Early

⁴⁰ <http://www.smh.com.au/news/technology/evolution-of-education/2006/10/09/1160246042551.html>

⁴¹ <http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/page.cgi?post=36031>

influences in this tradition were Rousseau, who in *Emile* (1762) argued for an organic child-centred pedagogy that would promote creativity and self-renewal to combat the debilitating effects of scientific reason, conventional roles and urban living. In the mid-1800s the American Transcendentalists, including Emerson and Thoreau, developed anti-materialist educational practices grounded in an organic epistemology which connected the individual with a transcendent Nature in a process of spiritual awakening (Miller, 1988).

The early 1900s saw the beginning of the schools associated with Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner (Waldorf), two significant holistic educational approaches that rejected scientific materialism. These are now well-established worldwide as alternatives to mainstream education. It was in 1960s however that more coherent and rigorous critiques of Western mainstream education began to emerge in the work of A.S. Neill, Paul Goodman, John Holt, Ivan Illich, Neil Weingartner, Charles Postman, and George Leonard. The common concerns of these writers included an emphasis on individual growth and happiness rather than the forced imposition of cultural practices, with teachers and students free to relate to each other as whole persons. Decision-making was democratic and the curriculum was essentially problem-based with intrinsic motivation rather than a decontextualised and abstract syllabus based on facts and right answers. The main basis for these ideas was a romantic faith in human nature coupled with a conviction that mainstream schooling actively negated the latent powers of creativity and learning possessed by all individuals.” (Frielick 2004, p61⁴²)

In *Education and Ecstasy* (1968) George Leonard anticipates ‘networked learning’ by 3 decades in his description of a 21st century school:

“When a child takes the chair to begin learning, another radio receiver senses his presence through his electronic identification device (EID) and signals the central learning computer to plug in that particular child’s learning history through Communal Interconnect (CI) the material on one learning display sometimes influences and is influenced by the material on nearby displays. This makes the learning process far more communal. It also helps tie together all forty displays into a single learning-art object, enhancing learning and appreciation ... ” (p149)

The point for me is that the idea of ‘e-learning 2.0 / the network way’ has been around for centuries. What is different now is that we have the tools to make it happen on a planetary scale. Sherry Turkle⁴³ points out that internet concretises the Lacanian notion that identity is constituted in language, or in other words, a new technology gives form to an abstract psychological theory. In the same way, networked information technologies can be seen as the physical manifestation of an ecological epistemology - which in my understanding is ancient in origin. This is why we need mythology to truly understand what is going on with the internet and networked learning, why McLuhan always to turned to Joyce⁴⁴ and Finnegans Wake.

As William Irwin Thompson reminds us, we now live at the edge of history, which is myth. And on this edge we encounter the transformation of the body in the shift to an electronic age, where “what McLuhan recognised, but did not explicitly state, was that our new highly advanced electronic media if used by evolutionarily unadvanced mortals will lead to cultural annihilation. These new media that work with the speed of light require a new spiritual consciousness of Light ... we either shift upward to a new culture of a higher spirituality to turn our electronic technologies into cathedrals of light, or we slide downward to

42 <http://northnet.northland.ac.nz/community/course/view.php?id=16>

43 <http://web.mit.edu/sturkle/www/>

44 <http://www.antigonishreview.com/bi-106/106-mcluhan.html>

darkness and entropy in a war of each against all ..." (Coming into Being p8)

For my part, we need all the myth we can get. Education can become ecstasy in the networked world, but I think we need transformed institutions to 'cathedralise' learning by intergrating the best of the old and the new. Not a compromise or 'middle way' - just an acknowledgement of the creative tension generated by the continuum between 'closed' and 'open', rigour and imagination, and innovative ways to make science, art and culture out of it.

Comments to Education and ecstasy

Mark Nichols

Hi Stanley,

I just want to add a perspective to one of your statements (1. above):

"The traditional role of the teacher as the transmitter of knowledge is over. We are all equal - no more groups, no more unequal power relations, no more hierarchies."

Perhaps it might be more accurate to suggest that the role of the teacher solely as transmitter of knowledge is subsumed into more of a holistic role, as a high-status member of a *network* made up of ontological equals. True, we are all equal - but we are not all the same. All perspectives are valuable, but some perspectives are more valuable than others; this will only become exacerbated in the first scenario you suggest. The implications of this for power relations depends on the openness of those with recognised expert knowledge (which needn't necessarily be attributed to those with the highest qualification!) It would be interesting to see whether the default of 'no more hierarchies' would hold for long, given that particular levels of debate and emergent group (or network...) norms would encourage participation by some but not necessarily by others. A fully egalitarian society has its critics. Power and hierarchies in such societies still tends to exist, just not explicitly. Political egalitarianism and material egalitarianism have their problems and internal contradictions; educational egalitarianism will as well, even if it could be realised. the problem is not necessarily one of systems, more of human nature.

In short, if we were ever able to start scenario 1, chances are it would soon degenerate into something similar to what we have now - a small group of active participants, with a large group of read-only participants. Power structures and hierarchies tend to be implicit rather than explicit... even a community as open as TALO has a very small number of active participants. Could it be so because of implicit power relationships and hierarchies? Not a dig at TALO - far from it, I am learning so much from it - but rather an example that even in very open communities structures, power and hierarchies are still present.

For what it's worth...

I'm also looking forward to digesting Stephen's IT Forum article. I especially appreciate the way he's linked to various sites to provide further insight into where he is coming from.

Mark.

Leigh Blackall

hmmm,

It is true that hierarchies seem to naturally form - we are far from deschooled sadly - but the key difference today is that anyone can speak at anytime. The fact that most don't doesn't really matter, what matters I think is that the opportunity to speak is never technically blocked by qualification, peer review, funny black hats, light weight gowns and a tube of paper, money and enrolment, etc... there are still quite a few technicalities in the way (Internet and computer access most obviously) and plenty to keep fending off (imperialistic ideas of intellectual property, patents and copyright for example). Being aware of the power dynamics in any given situation is important, which is what I think makes the open space challenge a valuable effort. What we do with the realisations remains to be seen.

Stanley, I still think you are documenting not two ends, but a middle and an end. The end in this case being option 2, and the middle being option 1. I'm not totally clear what the other end is yet, it is a 3rd wave yet to hit us I suspect. It may emerge in the realisation of mobile, or when the 2nd wave adopters push the more radical into new territory (such as is happening in the case of Downes responding to many challenges to his position). But I'm not satisfied that the status quo is suitably challenged. The current challenge as it presently stands - or more accurately, the way it is being interpreted by us who work within the system - is still too easily absorbed by present and flawed system. Which is why I'm still waiting for the other end to emerge.

Capillaries of power – Stanley Frielick

<http://www.flexilearn.com/?p=9#more-9>

Both Leigh and Mark commented on the previous post in relation to power - that “even in open communities structures, power and hierarchies are still present” (Mark) and “being aware of the power dynamics in any given situation is important” (Leigh). I agree that power is an important issue, and all the more so because if learning and institutions are going to be more open, ecological, and ‘networked’ it is necessary to be very clear about the power arrangements that might help or hinder the transformation.

In most posts and articles I read (and I’m generalising) there is a tendency to assume that power is hierarchical, top-down, and exerted by more powerful over less-powerful individuals. This is what might be called a dualistic or modernist view of power. In an ecological perspective however, power is an energy that circulates through the capillaries of network - both in biological terms and in social organisations. This ecological postmodern view is shared by theorists such as Foucault, McLuhan, and Bateson, who have a common understanding that:

“an individual is not a discrete and passive entity who is buffeted by the forces of power. Rather, the notion of an individual is itself an effect of the ways in which power is expressed through all the relations that constitute and sustain the patterns of social life. An individual (in terms of self-concept and ways of thinking and acting) is largely constituted by the networks of relations that regulate language patterns, status systems, social customs, modes of expression, and all the other forms and processes that intertwine in the fabric of a culture. In this view power is not a hierarchical construct that is held by a dominant group and then wielded over the oppressed. Rather, institutional power circulates through the arteries and capillaries of the body of reason, and exists as a set of relations between the forms of knowledge and their material manifestations.

In this sense the teaching/learning situation is also constituted by the networks or ‘capillaries of power’ that establish the dominance of certain discourses and sustain the technologies that connect knowledge to power. This implies a view that is different from the administrative and managerial hierarchies usually seen as the structures of academic power. The focus of analysis here is on the technologies of power that produce knowledge about both the institution and the individual, and in the process control both

The “capillaries of power” in the university can be conceived of as various nodes and networks of relationships between the mental ecology or idea of a University, and the university corporation □ the staff, students and the buildings they learn and work in. Here there are primarily three sets of nodal relations which interact with each other in various ways to form the patterns that characterise academic activity: 1) the canonisation of the general education curriculum, 2) the induction of the novice scholar, and 3) the evaluation of staff. To these I have added a fourth - the standards and criteria for granting of degrees established by external agencies such as accreditation bodies or quality assurance processes.....” (Frielick 2004 p155⁴⁵).

These 4 ‘nodes’ of capillary power are what we have to focus on if we want to bring about any sustainable change in a teaching/learning ecosystem. They can all be characterised by a closed...open continuum or

45 <http://northnet.northland.ac.nz/community/course/view.php?id=16>

dynamic - where in traditional institutions the bias and focus of activity is directed towards closed modes of gatekeeping and control. For example, the 'discipline' or 'canon' set of power relations forges a complex set of constraints over the content of courses and the types of knowledge accepted as 'valid' in a curriculum. Largely, these have been set and maintained over centuries by the 'technologies of power' inherent in scholarly journals, professional associations, academic committees, etc. As with the other sets of capillary relations in the diagram - the internet and networked open knowledge movements are rapidly disrupting the sets of power relations around disciplinary canon. As knowledge increasingly becomes free and open, and as networks enhance connectivity between different branches of knowledge, the traditional canons and gatekeeping apparatuses will dissolve (but not so simply). The important question though is how to maintain some kind of framework for legitimating and validating knowledge. Personal learning environments, RSS filters, consensus through rankings, are all evolving quickly and will no doubt form an important part of a new process that is more directed to open empowerment rather than closed systems of control.

Similar processes are happening at the other nodes and complex pathways of our traditional knowledge ecosystems. The emerging tools and approaches of networked learning will surely play a major role, but we must not be deluded that this is an automatic process that will just happen because of the inevitable evolution of technology. The system of power has to be seen eco-logically, not as a hierarchical construct of presidents, managers, and so on down the ranks. Every individual can be a node of change. Teachers can and are letting go of traditional concepts of curriculum, declarative knowledge, and the 'expert' as source. The approach is, as Foucault suggested:

"to analyze the specificity of the mechanisms of power and to build, little by little, strategic knowledge. What we have to present are instruments and tools that people might find useful. By forming groups specifically to make these analyses, to wage these struggles, by using these instruments or others: this is how, in the end, possibilities open up...."

Comments to Capillaries of power:

Mark Nichols

Nice one Stanley. You've placed Leigh's and my comments in the correct framework, which is most appreciated. Removing hierarchies does not remove power; the challenge, as you say, is "how to maintain some kind of framework for legitimating and validating knowledge." This, to me, is the fundamental weakness of complete emancipation in education. Scholarly journals are indeed examples of 'technologies of power' but they serve a definite and highly valuable function.

I think that we should consider the role of journals not to illegitimise the content produced by individuals, but rather as sources of 'canon' (again your terminology is most helpful) that assist to make learning a more efficient and informed exercise.

Also appreciated your comment on the changing practice of teachers. I hope it is not long before the profession is perceived as empowering as well!

Best,

Mark.

Networks Of Expertise - Graham Wegner

<http://gwegner.edublogs.org/2006/11/09/networks-of-expertise/>



<http://flickr.com/photos/mobology/250943958/>

The concepts of networks, groups and communities has me fascinated. The more I read, the less clear I am about what are the defining qualities of each word. I actually suspect that all three words mean different things to different people. Not only that but I suspect that what people think that others think is also not necessarily aligned. But that doesn't stop one person (this is not an allusion to any one individual in particular) from believing that they have someone's definition pegged. So I keep reading, hoping for clarity. I've seen all three terms debated on the TALO Groups⁴⁶ list. Irena White then proposed that communities sat as the halfway point between networks and groups. I piped in and said that I thought a community was one variation of a group -

Actually, I'm not too sure that the whole idea of community in an online setting isn't a bit of a utopian buzzword. To me, a community is a group.

- I should have shut up - because it isn't a definition that I can back up with argument and logic. Irena's original observation backed onto a long exchange of views between Teemu Leinonen and Stephen Downes on the same list and its sibling list, FLNW - a list that grew out of the Leigh Blackall inspired travelling unconference of the same acronym. Those two weren't even using the word community in that discussion.

Community as a term gets bandied around a lot these days and it's because of that, I have a hard time being sure what someone means when they mention the edublogging community. I mean, we have "community of learners", staff and leadership at my site refer to the "school community", some people choose to live in a "gated community" and then volunteers help out "the less fortunate in the community." So, if you are involved in a particular activity, maybe stamp collecting as an example, are you automatically part of that community? Or do you have the choice to join, or to stand alone, or even to start your own stamp collecting community? How about the idea of community leaders? How does that work? Are the leaders acknowledged as such because they've collected the most stamps, or have been collecting for the longest time, or because they've accumulated the largest knowledge base on the subject of stamps? Or maybe the leaders are the people helping others to start their own stamp collections or organising stamp based events for the community (however it is defined)?

46 <http://groups.google.com/group/teachAndLearnOnline>

When I first started blogging way back in August of 2005, I was totally in awe of Will Richardson. Here was this bloke who was a grand pioneer of blogging in education, had generated a lot of momentum for emerging technologies in the classroom and was writing his own book, for goodness sake. I loved reading his thought provoking posts (still do) and somewhere in my twisted brain, I thought that if my efforts at education blogging attracted his notice, then maybe I was on the right track. I badly wanted to develop a blog that attracted insightful comments, promoted quality reflection and yes, that would be noticed by the luminaries of my newly compiled blogroll. I felt frustrated when bloggers starting out at the same time as me attracted praise in the posts of Weblogg-ed⁴⁷. Don't get me wrong - their accolades were well deserved and I was pleased that they were being highlighted - but what was missing from my own posts?

So, you can see I was a bit self-absorbed back then but maybe I was looking for my version of online community. Now I'm not sure that the concept of community is all that important. In Will, I think I saw a community leader and his approval then would have rubber stamped in my mind my membership of the edublogger community. But does such a community really exist? And if it does, what would qualify someone to claim membership? Can one maintain an online presence and connect to others via blogging without officially being considered part of a community?

So as my blogging skills improved, as my writing found its "voice" and became more authentic, others from different parts of the world and from different sectors of education and different walks of life became important nodes in my Learning Network. The methods and means of discovery were varied. I found amazing sources of new ideas and inspiration in the Aussie and Kiwi VTE sector, I could relate to the gritty, warts'n'all classroom practitioners in far flung parts of the North American continent, I was challenged by radicals and free thinkers sometimes reviled by more mainstream edubloggers and if this is a community, then the pieces don't fit together neatly at all. But they don't need to. I want to include in my aggregator bloggers who reject groupthink as much as I want to benefit from the camaraderie and the mutual work-hard-for-the-benefit-of-others more group orientated bloggers. I think I can have the benefits of both styles of learning and thinking. Minh McCloy in the same TALO thread summed up my thoughts pretty well:

Compulsory grouping is very hard on the solitaries amongst us. Choosing instead, to establish links with others who offer possibilities potentialities is an attractive alternative. Groupers often feel so rejected when an individual doesn't want to group with them. Groupers will sometimes lash out & call such folk sad & lonely - or even witches & heretics.

The K-12 Online Conference seems to be generating a sense of community amongst many edubloggers - maybe there are some who feel that the Conference helped to solidify the concept of an edublogger community. Darren Kuropatwa⁴⁸ has been mulling over some of these aspects as well, but sees some negative aspects I'm a bit unaware of. (That's not unusual for me, though!)

There are a lot more educational bloggers now. The community has ballooned and continues to grow. The camaraderie that came from the sharing spirit (which still dominates most discussions) is being questioned. And while maybe that's a good thing, it hurts those that are just doing what they've always done; trying to share what they've learned. Perhaps selfishly — in the hope that someone will reciprocate that sharing — but essentially following the collaborative ethos that has permeated educational blogging.

47 <http://weblogg-ed.com/2005/more-ed-bloggers/>

48 <http://adifference.blogspot.com/2006/10/coming-of-age.html#comments>

I don't think that camaraderie has ever been questioned from where I sit. And trying to share what's been learned is what this post is about. I'm still no closer to really understanding what community means to me.

Or to anyone else, for that matter.

Darren's final comment on his post is worth repeating though.

So bring on the critical analysis of our practices and thinking! It is through those conversations that we learn and grow. Let us also leave behind the dim coloured lenses that obscure each others thinking and ideas. If that's where the conversation is headed, then I'm not prepared to participate in it.

Maybe, I've been lucky that negativity hasn't really come my way. I've been able to pick and choose to participate here and there in many great things and move between many different spheres of influence. I wouldn't and couldn't throw my lot in to be part of one identified edublogger community - and I don't think such a thing exists. With all due respects to Will Richardson, I don't seek or need his approval or acknowledgement anymore.

Comments on Networks Of Expertise

Will Richardson

Hey Graham,

The community (in whatever iteration you define it) is stronger today because educators like you have chosen to share their voices and become a part of the learning. The only rubber stamp anyone needs to be a part of this comes from within, comes from a desire to keep learning and evolving which you obviously have. I think congratulations are in order! ;0)

Best,

Will

Graham

Thanks, Will, I appreciate your thoughts. Although I stated that I don't need rubber stamping from you as my example (or Leigh or Doug or Jo or Artichoke or anyone else who I read avidly and whose ideas I grapple with) it is a real pleasure that you decide to add your voice here anyway. I still think that it would be great if you could make it down under sometime - even for a virtual event in the manner that we had Barbara Ganley earlier this year. Cheers!

The highlight of my (our ?) day here in Wellington at eFest06 goes to Konrad Glogowski – Alex Hayes

<http://alexanderhayesblog.blogspot.com/2006/09/conrad-tale-of-teachers.html>



<http://flickr.com/photos/mobology/252419545/>

The story goes like this.

Konrad was at school, in class, thoroughly distracted, reading a book under his desk while his teacher ranted on to the class of students about mathematical possibilities, attempting to elucidate a concept in a thoroughly didactic manner.

Noticing Konrad was not paying any attention, Konrad was summoned to answer a question by the teacher.....on the spot. The question asked was;

" If I have a cupboard full of shoes.....sixty pairs to be exact.....and the cupboard is in complete darkness and the shoes are in a big mixed unsorted pile, what is the mathematical probability of picking out of that pile of shoes the exact two pair of shoes with matching colours, size and style.

Pregnant pause.

The whole class are poised. Konrad thinks for a moment and replies knowing full well that any answer except the correct one will have him in detention for that afternoon. The students wait with baited breath.

He answers.

" 100 percent "

The teacher looks at him confounded and rather astounded. The students half giggle in embarrassment. Konrad shifts in his seat.

The teacher replies.

"How do you come up with such a finding Glogowski ? "

Konrad replies.

"Well.....turn the light on".

The class bursts into a uproar after a deadly moment of silence.

My take on Konrad's story is that we are often (as teachers) so busily buried in seeking answers and expounding truths, and impressing others with rants of rage that we cease to acknowledge the power of simplicity and cogent truth.

Nothing is so complicated that we cant turn our own light switch on or at least let students do so and admit our own failure to engage them with solid reason.

In fact, in this age of blended (picture a blender) online delivery modalities it perhaps begs the question of where on earth our sense of reason and commonsense has gone to.

This is further propounded when we reflect on the plethora of mistakes and ridiculous waste of funding that occurs simply because educational organisations cant hear the trees falling in the forest because of the thunderous applause for those who claim that they are the giants in the forest.

Nine times out of ten learners seek answers from educators not to relieve the boredom of questions rather to escape the position of being unheard.

How simple the process for learning would be if only we gave the learners access to times where we listened rather than ranted.....and time to de-construct the clock.



<http://flickr.com/photos/bee/252626496/>

Progressive Discourse Revisited – Konrad Glogowski

<http://www.teachandlearn.ca/blog/2006/08/10/progressive-discourse-revisited/>

I received a number of e-mails and comments in response to my entry on Progressive Discourse. Some asked if I could offer an explanation as to why the students switched into the progressive discourse mode. I've been thinking about the reason why it happened and I believe that it had to do with three things: the transformation that I went through as a teacher, dialogical understanding of texts, and writing as the act of community creation. Let me explain.

Teacher as Learner

Learning to transform my classroom practice was very difficult and I certainly don't want to sound like someone who believes he has mastered this difficult new role of a teacher in a networked environment. I think I did well but I still have a lot to learn about what it means to be "dethroned" by a community of bloggers. It was a very difficult process and had a profound impact on my understanding of professional development. I had to learn how to learn with my students, how to become a learner and, yes, how to stop teaching. When I say stop teaching, I, of course, refer to the transmission mode of teaching. I was still teaching as a learner/participant but it was very different.

It started with facilitation. I spent a lot of time guiding and assisting my students. This involved class discussions about individual posts and blogs as well as conversations that began to develop in response to specific entries. Gradually, however, I began to realize that I needed to become more than a facilitator (hence my previous entry) and tried to enter the community as a learner, writer, and contributor. This proved to be very difficult because I did not want my students to know that I also had gaps in my knowledge and that, as an individual, I also wanted to spend some time reading and writing about topics that we were exploring - that I didn't have all the answers.

It was difficult not because of my students (who, by the way, thought it was the most natural thing to do) but because I kept thinking that by engaging myself in the process of learning I was neglecting the class. I thought that it was irresponsible to read and post about the Potsdam Conference, for example, while my students worked (seemingly) unsupervised. I abandoned many drafts of my own entries just because I felt



<http://flickr.com/photos/bee/250972500/>

the need to “move around” in the class blogosphere, to see what the students were doing, to comment, assist, and oversee. It took me a while to realize that I could contribute more as a learner than in my capacity as a teacher. It gave me an opportunity to immerse myself in the cognitive current that my students had created through the simple act of writing to learn. I found myself linking to their work, while my own entries, filled with links to numerous online resources, showed them one possible way of cognitive engagement with the chosen topic. In some cases, the work of my students aligned so closely with my own interests that an interesting partnership was formed whereby we learned from and through each other’s writing. I was able to model reflective thinking and writing, and I saw that many of them followed my example. I did not know it at the time but I now realize that by entering the community as a participant, I was setting the stage for semantic apprenticeship or “instructional conversation” - a dialogic process of meaning-making that emerges from the student’s engagement with a particular task.

The Role of Texts

The second reason why I think the class eventually switched to the progressive discourse mode was our new understanding of texts. My challenge was to create an environment whose structure would make it easy for my students to see that every text is, as Gregory Clark argues,

suspended in an exchange of texts in which it contributes to the collaborative process through which the knowledge that constitutes the community that comprises its writer and readers is continually reconstructed (Clark 1990, 68).

I also wanted my students to understand and see through everyday interactions that writing and reading are not private acts and that

every text is necessarily public and political as it contributes to the perpetual process in which the values and beliefs that sustain community life are modified and revised, that writing and reading are both public acts that carry with them significant social responsibility (Clark 1990, 69).

In short, I wanted to create a community that would instill in my students the understanding that texts are dialogical, that they construct social knowledge, and that texts are never individual in nature but are threads in a complex fabric of social interactions. The role of the student in this space changed from that of an imitative apprentice to that of critical collaborator (Clark 1990, 69). In short, there was a strong emphasis on reflection, questioning, and conversation.

Writing Ourselves into Existence

Finally, I need to stress that as a group we had a clear purpose and that, in my opinion, is what really helped us see ourselves as a community of learners. This community emerged not because we were all writing together in the same online space. It did not emerge because some of our interests happened to coincide. The community emerged because there was one overriding purpose - to learn more about the key themes of the course. The purpose was to build and contribute knowledge, to learn together - engage in the process of “purposefully knowing together” (Wells & Haneda, 2000).

This ongoing exchange of ideas (centred around one clear, collective goal) helped all of us see that we were contributing to a larger whole. This was not in addition to class work or some preconceived, carefully delineated curriculum. No. This mesh of interactions was the curriculum. Unlike the environment in a typical LMS where the discussion forum is an additional space where students can interact, this community was written into existence by contributions made by every single student. This was our space. There was nothing else; no resource collections or teacher-generated lesson plans. It started with an idea which grew through individual contributions and a growing network of interactions.

Notes:

Clark, G. (1990). Dialogue, dialectic, and conversation. A social perspective on the function of writing. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Haneda, M & Wells, G. (2000). "Writing in knowledge-building communities." Research in the teaching of English, 34 (3), 430-457. (PDF available [here](#)).



<http://flickr.com/photos/leighblackall/245975148/>

Open Access Content for Learning – Derek Wenmoth

http://blog.core-ed.net/derek/2006/09/open_access_content_for_learn.html

I spent a morning at the Future Learning for a Networked World open seminar in Christchurch a couple of days ago at which I had the pleasure of meeting and talking with Stephen Downes about the whole idea of open content. He reminded me about the Directory of Open Access Journals⁴⁹ that exists online, providing an amazing source of journals and articles that can be accessed free to support courses - instead of paying a premium for textbooks.

There are many good reasons for considering this - apart from the cost, textbooks and other traditional forms of published material are in danger of becoming increasingly irrelevant in our education system as emerging ways of creating, contributing, reviewing and using digital content become the 'norm'.

With this in mind I was interested to view a video-cast by Richard Baraniuk⁵⁰ (pictured above) on TEDtalk dealing with this very topic as he talks about a project he is involved with called Connexions. Baraniuk is a Rice University professor with a giant vision: to create a free, global online education system. In this presentation, he introduces Connexions, the open-access publishing system that's changing the landscape of education by providing free coursework and educational materials to everyone in the world.

Baraniuk's presentation is very easy to follow and understand, and it presents a vision of a future that I'd rather like to be a part of!

49 <http://www.doaj.org/articles/about>

50 http://www.ted.com/tedtalks/tedtalksplayer.cfm?key=r_baraniuk&flashEnabled=1

Out from under the umbrellas – Leigh Blackall

<http://teachandlearnonline.blogspot.com/2006/10/out-from-under-umbrellas.html>

"...When the processes of formal training and assessment separate, institutionalised learning will be in crisis..."

Stephen Downes in a conversation with TANZ CEOs in Christchurch, September 21.

A scenario to help explain:

In the interests of quality assurance, builders in New Zealand are soon to be required to hold a certificate, however there is a shortage of builders in many areas of NZ.

To fast track certification and to ensure numbers of builders continue to be available, training organisations and builders associations will set up Recognition of Prior Learning and some training opportunities where needed.

If done well, the RPL process will become a fast track, cheaper option for certification. It is likely that smaller organisations will set up and sustain themselves solely on the provision of assessment for RPL, while others will focus on specific, just in time training.

This will create more options for people requiring certification and or training. People and industry will welcome shorter and/or more flexible training and certification opportunities, preferring work place training and assessment that is customised to their needs.

Secondary schools will start to align curriculum with these smaller providers and student income subsidies may begin to extend their support to include study with these agencies.

Training and education institutions, heavy with a wide variety of both viable and non viable courses, and no longer enjoying exclusive recognition from student income subsidies, start to struggle under their inefficient size and processes.

Here is where the crisis begins...

I'm not too sure how sound or desirable such a scenario is, but there is plenty of evidence to say this is well under way already. It is basically a huge decentralisation of training and education.



<http://flickr.com/photos/tallchris/14288252/>

Out from under the umbrellas

The best response in my view is for the institutions themselves to decentralise in some way, and what follows is how I think that can best occur.

It just so happens that the long held and increasingly popular apprenticeship model is quite complimentary to this need to decentralise. Complimentary to the apprenticeship model is networked learning. On the one hand is an efficient, demonstrate and practice, mentor learning structure, while on the other is the enablement of an independent, informed and networked learner. Let me paint a picture:

Imagine if your institution allowed for more individualism. Your answer might be something like, "...Otago Polytechnic works for me..." rather than "...I work for Otago Polytechnic..." A place where the brand, the infrastructure, the management and hierarchy, and the assets were in some way answerable or subsumed to the individuals who work from the organisation as a base.

The individual teacher would be out from under the umbrella of the organisation as a whole, and made more responsible for their own actions - or lack thereof - while the organisation and its hierarchy is set up to support the development of that individualism in its teachers. Teachers would be expected (but not required) to establish and maintain a presence, a portfolio so to speak, always up to date - up to the second, with the work they are doing, their research, their ideas and thinking, their experiments, their teaching, and their communications with professional networks. A blog could be one way, but not the only way. Individuals from around the world can attach to the organisation by way of endorsement from the organisation for their work. They would have the opportunity to benefit from its support in negotiable terms. While the organisation benefits from a more flexible, individually responsible, diverse work force.

The important point is that the organisation becomes far less centralised and less identifiable en-mass or as a whole. It is more clearly identified by the individuals that grow from its base. It is made up of many individuals with explicit directions, expertise, interests etc, while the organisation is geared to support those individuals with professional development, admin, promotions, development funding and the like.

One more scenario:

Roy is a lecturer in cooking within a training institution called Tekotago.

Much needed mature and focused cooking students are taking advantage of alternative training and assessment options, leaving only the less mature and less focused students in his classes who need role models

This trend is undermining the quality of Roy's training and affecting his motivation.

Roy, along with around 30% of the institution's lecturers has decided to develop a public profile as a cooking expert and teacher and use the Institution's resources more independently.

He is given ownership of his intellectual property, independence from the organisational hierarchy, support in terms of admin, pay, infrastructure, development budget and the like, but is now more responsible for the quality of his overall work.

Roy is less restricted by the organisation and is able to work independently, proactively and responsively to the training needs and trends of his potential students with resourcing support from the organisation.

He is identified as Roy the Cooking teacher endorsed by Tekotago rather than simply a teacher at Tekotago

He remains with the organisation for the support in admin, secure income, professional development opportunities, and access to development funds, but he is free to become totally independent should he choose.

Of course the questions flap in the wind... what is to become of the teacher who prefers the shelter of the organisation... the way I see it, both can exist - for now.

Comments to Out from under the umbrellas

Graham Wegner said...

Did I see the word "portfolio" slipped in there somewhere? ;-) How do you think your vision could apply to the K-12 sector?

Leigh Blackall said...

Hmmm, hadn't considered that at all. I think it could begin to apply in highschool... when interests in vocation begins and is encouraged.

Loganlea State high⁵¹ has a model that could apply.

Artichoke said...

I like the way you are exploring the other ladder Leigh

Downes mimics E.M. Forster

As long as learning is connected with earning, as long as certain jobs can only be reached through exams, so long must we take this examination system seriously. If another ladder to employment was contrived, much so-called education would disappear, and no one would be a penny the stupider.

- Illich's dechooling sense of what "lifelong learning" might be has been totally betrayed its use today to support the plethora of institutionalised "pay to learn" tertiary qualification/certification experiences we offer today.

Leigh Blackall said...

Am I bordering on betraying Illich myself? I don't think so - though it could be so in the interpretation... the way I see it, the notion of life long learning, as is banded around these days - is poorly articulated and so can

51 http://portscreate.blogspot.com/2003_07_01_portscreate_archive.html#1058

easily be reused in the context of deschooled thought.. So I reckon.

K.Glogowski said...

Leigh,

This is a very interesting scenario and made me think of my own experiences as a grad student. My thesis supervisor is a very accomplished and highly motivated educator - someone who continues to inspire me to keep writing and learning every time we meet. We do meet on a regular basis to discuss my progress. We also exchange e-mails about upcoming conferences, writing proposals, and anything else that needs to be discussed by a thesis supervisor and her graduate student. We often meet at her house because it is just more convenient for both of us (no parking costs and less traffic). As a result, I spend very little time at the university. In fact, over the course of the past academic year, I was there only twice.

As I read your entry, I was reminded of the fact that I pay thousands of dollars every year to "attend" the university and yet find very little value in spending my time inside its walls. What I do value immensely is the ability to meet with my thesis supervisor whenever we want/need to and to build a professional relationship that benefits both of us - my thesis is, after all, a learning experience for both of us.

So, the question is, do I really need the university itself? What I'm really interested in is building professional relationships with researchers and educators who can help me achieve my goals. One could argue that the university promotes that by helping grad students find the right people and engage in work they love. On the other hand, many of us would be just as successful in finding these people using Technorati or Google. That, of course, would work only if they came out from under the umbrella and began to establish their own points of presence online.

Of course, I still need the university to issue that diploma at the end of this process. However, it is my thesis supervisor - her support, encouragement, and advice - that I will take with me as I enter the next phase of my life and not the name of the university itself (although many places and people still place more emphasis on where the thesis/degree was granted as opposed to under whose guidance it was completed).

Needless to say, I think these umbrellas are often limiting. Now, I'm really interested in how this applies to K-12.

Leigh Blackall said...

Yikes! Now the institutions really DO have a reason for stopping their employees from stepping out into the open.. its the perception that the institution is not needed!...

This is why the admin of these institutions also need to come out. So we know exactly what it is that makes an institution tick, and why/what we need in them - or not.

Good grief it would be a shake up.

Basically I think you said it all with, "One could argue that the university promotes that by helping grad students find the right people and engage in work they love." There's a lot to this than first meets the eye.

There will be a lot of people who do not want to, can't and shouldn't come out. They may need the protection of the university. So I tend to think we need the institutions so we can preserve many aspects of knowledge. Ancient Greek perhaps, most of the humanities and social sciences, things that are arguably not going to survive (or be significantly weakened) if we made individuals fend for themselves.

So, we need both. Did I say that!

As for K12. Also both. Taking a web presence, and a cool Ask Ninja styled alter ego one at that⁵², is so much easier for the already creative teacher. So, on the one hand they have the school and classroom that suites some of the kids, then they have the alter ego that helps some of the others. Perhaps a kid has just been suspended... they are sent to the library for the rest of the day, and the librarian puts them at a computer and show's them Mr G dressed as a Ninja, Mr G dresses as a fur trapper, Mr G as Big Bird etc :)

Suddenly, learning about ancient egypt is funny, if still bewilderingly stupid for a 14 year old to be thinking about.

52 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEmss2lg-ug&eurl=>

“Nobody owns it, everybody can use it and anybody can improve it” Metaphors - Artichoke

http://artichoke.typepad.com/artichoke/2006/10/nobody_owns_it_.html



<http://flickr.com/photos/bee/252626496/>

Has been a turbulent week in Auckland – I know it is still school holidays but I have been doing action research around the three drinks metaphor with as many different minds as I could persuade to join me. Has been even more draining than those “when you know you shouldn’t” Bogart and Bacall on the balcony moments ” at ULearn06.

Some Artichokean think tankers reacted in a Zoidbergian way to their invitations – much like I did when the Magnet for Misadventure accepted an (e) party invite from the MoE on my behalf at ULearn06.

Zoidberg: “Strange...
Why would Nixon - an

awkward, uncomfortable man - suddenly throw a party? One of the most social events imaginable! It's a trap is why!"

And I found these “constantly looking over one shoulder” thinkers were much more challenging to move through the 3 drink sequence towards Sidorkian dialogue⁵³.

Artistotelian excluded middle thinking be damned - paranoia saw them shuck neatly into two buckets - some determinedly requesting mineral water throughout and, others bolting through three drink exchanges to five, six and ten drinks under the table and on the floor dialogue before I could introduce the thinking metaphor challenge.

However, I can report that as a result of all this thinking through drinking research I find the 3 drinks metaphor limited when we are representing possibilities for generative dialogue involving the net.

Cj encouraged me to explore metaphor through Doc Searls on the Giant Zero video⁵⁴ at Berkman September 20 2006

“The origin of the metaphor, however, is Craig Burton, who was the first to observe that an end-to-end architecture in which every point is essentially zero distance from

⁵³ <http://sidorkin.net/pdf/dis.pdf>

⁵⁴ <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/mediaberkman/2006/09/20/doc-searls-on-the-giant-zero/>

every other point (and as stupid as possible in the middle as well), would geometrically resemble a 3-D zero."

"The giant zero" where being networked means you are free to have end to end relationships with anyone anywhere anytime seems to capture much of the same thinking that Sidorkin tilts at with his exuberance of voices "three drink metaphor", BUT takes it further for thinking about dialogue in a networked world.

Searl's "nobody owns it, everybody can use it and anybody can improve it" is exactly what we valorise the integration of ICT in knowledge building constructivist pedagogies in schools preparing for the mythical 21st Century Learner.. However, we kneecap what we valorise- – not only through the institutional hierarchical power plays but also in the stark confrontational way we militate dialogue with our virtual classrooms replicas, LMS, SMS, passwords, ID, Watchdog surveillance in educational institutions. Check out BardWired's Filtering Frustrations lament

Searl's "architecture that is all ends" metaphor suggests that when "nobody owns it, everybody can use it and anybody can improve it" is the infrastructure of our dialogue, then everybody is "generative – by ourselves and with others".

Is undoubtedly the botanist in me but I have always been fascinated by process, by squeezing, and water loss – fascinated by the process whereby plant debris becomes peat, peat becomes lignite, lignite becomes coal, and coal becomes graphite – It is another metaphor that works for dialogue and knowledge construction on the web...

First we must bury the idea of plant debris dialogue in the sediment of many voices to squeeze out as much water as we can. Heaping more sediment onto dialogue through our internet connectivity - adding in time and a friction of connectivity warmth will cause dialogue to breakdown releasing gases (hot air conversations all that farting and belching ranting discourse). The squeezing out of water and release of those hydrocarbon gases from peat dialogue leaves a more intense and focused dialogue. Makes "dialogue" carbon rich – creates pure graphite dialogue, makes dialogue generative, makes dialogue into infrastructure.

Tracking "process" on the web leads to Seal's notions of a "static web" and a "live web". The "One looks through billions and the other listens to millions" stuff.

If "the static web is about spaces and places, the live web is about time and people."

Static Web search sends bots out to crawl and index billions of sites. Live web search listens to pings from millions of syndicated feeds, or live sources and indexes just those. Technorati's goal is a time to index (heard ping to searchability) of under one minute

Live Web search only responds to signs of life.

Live web as signs of life, signs of life as dialogue – what a fabulous criteria for assessing whether we have dialogue – dialogue not simply something that happens after 3 drinks when identity to the group loosens and the idea can be tossed around and played with – dialogue is recognised as generative – as signs of life, signs of life

I recognise that dialogue is what happens with ed_bloggers – with a sharing of provisional thinking – with offering raw and flawed thinking for comment by others , with continual revisions, - with reoriginated conversation,- with relationships formed and developed.

Searl takes the thinking further – he layers this generative infrastructure between fashion and commerce on one side and governance, culture and nature on the other. You have to check out his visuals on this one. It is a geological framing. It is thinking that needs its own post

Comments to “Nobody owns it, everybody can use it and anybody can improve it” Metaphors

SC said...

I'm starting to think there might be some benefit to this ICT thing after all.

Cj said...

Benefit is the wrong tack. It's all about things being different. When was the last time you asked if a horse was better than a car, a crystal wireless set better than a portable radio. Much of what is done in relation to ICTs (CCTs) is blind faith and hope, we hope to heck it works, does what we want etc. Mostly, we get surprised. I think along with the fibre in the morning we need a couple of spoonfuls of technological humility (listen to James Boyle's brilliant keynote⁵⁵ from Beyond Broadcast in May this year at Berkman Centre), i.e. we are as James eloquently argued "really bad at predicting what happens with this stuff". Contrast that with the loopy assertions in relation to improving learning, changing schools, uplifting humanity... groan, groan, munch, munch.

And re metaphors and doc Searle -- a timely reminder to pay attention to the discursive space and the kind of analysis that Searle, Lakoff make should be first steps in any dealings with the dark side.

55 http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/dyn/ml/output.pl/40759/download/bb_boyle_2006%2D05%2D12.mp3

What would it be like to be the rain – Leigh Blackall

<http://teachandlearnonline.blogspot.com/2006/10/what-would-it-be-like-to-be-rain.html>

A few days ago I posted an idea called out from under the umbrellas, of why and how educational institutions should decentralise

Tonight is an idea of how formal teaching and learning, assessment and accreditation might occur in that decentralised educational context.

I was reading Artichoke's latest post, *Nobody owns it, everybody can use it and anybody can improve it* that motivated me to stop reading and start typing. However typical of the feeling after reading any Artichoke posts I'm left astounded at how much Arti can fit into a single sentence, let alone a post chock full of quotes, references and links! and bewildered on what I might say when it seems as though it has all been said.



<http://flickr.com/photos/margoconnell/259602481/>

But it is that sentence that Arti uses as the over all theme to her post that rang bells for me most. It reminded me of the Linux ads IBM is running on Youtube⁵⁶ - but more importantly how amazingly possible, if not already true the statement is.

I dunno why really, but it makes me want to imagine what would it be like to be the rain...

If you've read my post about decentralised education, out from under the umbrellas, then the title of this post may soon make more sense.

So, we have teachers with strong Internet presence. They point to, discuss, demonstrate, collate prolific amounts of information about their subject/s. They model the best practice possible, and lead by example. They share all that they know, and actively seek out what they don't, they are endorsed, supported and promoted by the institution/s they use as a base... in doing all this their Internet presence is strong, as it needs to be for this:

We have people all around the world, using the worlds biggest and most successful training provider (Google + wikipedia + youtube, etc) to access information and wherever possible, communication around what it is

56 <http://youtube.com/watch?v=4ZmJ63sHoKU>

they are wanting and needing to learn. With a strong and established Internet presence our brave new teachers get found.

It is here I start to think about ways to try and match institutional learning pathways to this informal and self paced learning method through Google et al.

Let's start by reminding ourselves how Ask Ninja explains podcasting:



I hope you managed to watch that movie. Basically Ninja describes the world of the person seeking ideas, entertainment, information and the like online. That person wanders the landscape of search results, random links and posts, surfing... they happen across a single piece of content that grabs their attention (be it because of the entertainment value like Ninja, or because of its perceived value in answering a question or problem, or both..)

The challenge for teachers I think, is how to develop a web presence in such a way that this person will want to come back, subscribe, or otherwise tune in to what you are doing.

For example, if I was exploring an interest in lets say...architecture, and happened across something you (a

teacher of it) had pegged - a quick video demonstrating how I might go about measuring my house and using Google Sketch Up⁵⁷ to draw my dream renovation... I could be made interested by this. Now that I'm interested, things that would draw my interest further would be if at the end, or attached to the video somewhere was some advice on what my next steps could be and how what I just learned relates to what I could learn more of.

Those suggested next steps would draw me into more of your work - micropedagogical dumps as Brent says, bite sized chunks of things that would make me want to stay or come back. Things that would maintain my interest would be more of those seemingly random content feeds relating to architecture, and ending in next steps and suggested relationships to various life contexts... more video demos, short audio recorded interviews with practitioners (5 - 10 minutes) from NZ, India, South Africa, Brazil, China... a nicely designed text for print that inspires me to think differently about architecture and its importance in web design... recordings of your 10 - 15 minute lectures (goodbye 1 - 2 hour lectures)...

Along the way I have come to realise that you are a lecturer in architecture. My eyebrows lift at this realisation and I instinctively compare you to my past experiences with teachers.. "man! this person is onto it!" I'd think. I'd start to become more impressed by your passion for the subject as I see that you post a new thing every second day or so. I become even more impressed when I come to learn that some of what you post refers to your students work! I follow the links into your students, and see how they blog about their work with you. I am allowed to see the conversations and authentic learning that you are facilitating with these people and I start to relate myself into the experience. No enrollment fee, password and login profile to block me there... I start to see that becoming a qualified architect may be a possibility for me, achievable in my spare time after work.

So I make contact with you. A few days later you reply. Not with an enrollment form and an 0800 number to call, but with get-to-know-ME questions. Genuine, personal. I reply with questions about your work, you reply with answers and pointers to other work. You ask me if I'd like to join a web conference with your class! I bork and get shy, you say, "no worries - just listen in if you like" and give me the time and link. I do listen in, and see that the group you are communicating with are people just like me, and once again I think how possible it might be for me to study to become an architect. I go away for a while and see what else I can find, but inevitably I keep falling back to your blog, looking for more of that initial experience.

Weeks later you send me an email with an assignment attached. You explain that you thought I'd be interested in having a go at it, and if I wanted to I could send it in when I finished it. No mention of a fee. I'm surprised by this, even a little suspicious, but on reading the assignment I am curious.

I few weeks later I build up the courage to send you my attempt at the assignment. A few days go by and you respond with an impressive amount of feedback, written not with a teacher voice, but with progressive discourse as Konrad calls it. As an equal - respectful, sensitive, and personal. You then point me to your own attempt at the same assignment and I find it amidst many others who have attempted the assignment in the past, some only days before me. I even comment in on some of them, and get responses asking to see mine. You ask me if you can put my assignment up with the others...

This goes on for sometime. The teacher has to manage quite a bit of online social activity around their subject area, but avoids forming groups or classes, always treats people as individuals, respectful of each individuals capacity and time frames. The teacher is basically nurturing people into a relationship with them

57 <http://youtube.com/watch?v=fj4qkMTEEIE>

and their work as teachers in the field. Teachers as equals, as participants in their own courses, participants in a network.

Let's review that. Individual teachers have strong, networked, Internet presence. Their presence is built on the basis of micro content. The potential student is looking at this world of networked information and communication. They draw focus on a particular element of content and find that it is networked into a chain of content. At any point, opportunities to communicate around that information is available. When the communication starts, so does the relationship, and the prolonged learning. I think this is starting to look like Stephen's picture of an alternative state education system posted October 6th⁵⁸.

but who pays?

Well, it's for free!! But some may choose to pay. Eventually many people will come to a point in their learning this way where they either need to be accredited or want to be. Some want recognition for their work, others legally require it to do further work. When they are at that point is when they (their employer, government or scholarship) pay. When the time for accreditation is agreed on (in other words when the teacher and the student agree that both are ready) the student enrolls and pays a fee, and the teacher introduces a team of independent assessors and everyone goes through the work that has been done. All the assignments, communications if need be, readings that were read and considered, portfolio, work experience, interviews, all of it is looked at to make an assessment for qualification. You have built relationships with learners, so if you're smart, it would make sense that I come to you for assessment and accreditation.

It is at this point where payment is made, the learning was free. Education costs, learning is for free.

So there it is, what I think it might be like to BE the rain.

Comments on What would it be like to be the rain

Bee said...

This and the previous post feel like rain washing my soul. Listen to this⁵⁹.

Leigh Blackall said...

Thanks Bee, I'm listening to this as I stain the floor of my house. I'd very much like to network myself into more of a South relationship. South Africa, South Pacific, South East Asia, Australia, and South America. There is such an amazing range of language, perspectives, economic condition, and unheard voices in the South.

This audio is a start, and I'll be sure to follow all the mentioned links after staining...

⁵⁸ See FLNW Thoughts later in this book

⁵⁹ <http://elearn.uwc.ac.za/usrfiles/content/fsoftlearn/media/gld-keats-pacific-sm.mp3>

pete said...

Tell 'im he's Dreamin'!.....:)

Who pays indeed. there are some really good ideas and description of an educational landscape I'd like to work in, but the reality i have to teach in would never be able to move that far.

But i do like some of the ideas you've outlined here.

Just like all change management strategies, I'll take some of these ideas and implement them in the framework I work in, little by little I'll work toward that dream.

Parag Shah said...

Hello Leigh,

I was delighted to read this post. It shows a grand vision for what is possible in years to come. And I am certain that it will. Subtle changes towards decentralization can already be felt.

A long time back I had read an article about how organizations can expand, not by employing more people, but by striking alliances with independent workers specializing in their own fields. This is almost the same concept applied to the corporate world.

Open source technologies, blogs, podcasts, video, tagging will take the decentralization concept a step further. But the main change will happen when the students themselves can break away from the shackles of "wanting to be taught", to "going out and learning". They need to imbibe the psychology of an adventurer, who knows that the information, mentors, and knowledge is all out there. All they have to do is start the ride and seek what they want. In my opinion this aspect is the one that is changing the slowest of all, and it is the one aspect that can have the biggest impact.

Would like to know what you think.

Leigh Blackall said...

Yes, the expectations of learners already fully socialised through 13 or more years of school, are certainly geared towards 'just wanting to be told in the most efficient way possible'. That is why I think it is urgent that teachers go first. The more teachers that go and learn what it is like to learn this way, the more of them who will come back with ideas on how to help resocialise - or deschool society into learning webs.. see Illich

Carole @ Wodonga said...

Hello Leigh, I am impressed with this latest 'out in the rain' analogy and it really resonates with me. It would be great if a few more innovative thinkers were leading our educational institutions and could see the immediate benefits of this model. Love the final quote, Learning is free, its education that costs.

BTW if you're reading this message today, Monday October 9, please contact the Knowledge Bank Networks organisers regarding your presentation with them this Thursday, October 12.

Regards from Coach Carole

Stanley said...

hi Leigh

there's a lot here that resonates with my view of where education should be going - I like the images of umbrellas and rain, and how they convey the tensions that exist in this new networked (or ecological) world of learning. I do think though that there's heaps that can be done to transform our existing institutions. The notion of teachers developing a more tangible internet presence is one, as you rightly point out. But after working in academic staff development for many years I sometimes wonder if this kind of transformation is actually possible for the majority of teaching staff in tertiary ed. Then there is also the major issue of the political and economic systems that support the present structures - or can it be that the 'rain' will simply wash these away ?

I also found it interesting that you used architecture as an example. Both Donald Schön (The Reflective Practitioner) and John Seeley Brown <http://www.johnseeleybrown.com/newlearning.pdf> have used architecture as examples of an educational approach that is transferable and scalable across other disciplines - but I think that both of them would insist that the studio model of learning would not be replicable online (but perhaps 2.0 tools make this a possibility?) ... anyway, I personally like the idea of being both the rain and the umbrella - heralding a new approach but also giving some strategies and tools for teachers on how to cope with it - as Dylan sang "it's a hard rain a gonna fall" :)

-Stanley

Merrolee said...

Hi Leigh

I really enjoyed your story and could see how learning could be.....

I just have two questions - one is who pays the wonderful facilitator of this person's learning - you mentioned that the student pays for the assessment.... but what about the hours that the facilitator has put in???

And.. I also struggled with the notion of how someone's skills when working with people? We have many hours of fieldwork in our programme where students work under the direct supervision of a registered therapist - they put their learning into practice..... Its not always safe to have patients/clients/consumers receive services from non-skilled professionals. I've seen the model where OT assistants are able to keep working as assistants and under the direction of a supervisor while they complete their theory..... and that works fine - because there are only 1 - 2 assistants and anywhere between 3 - 20 therapists.... so the services for the clients are still offered by registered staff. in health we couldn't have 20 students providing the service???? So your thoughts???

Leigh Blackall said...

Answering your first query regarding who pays - I don't think it would be a mistake to see this model as a replacement to current models, I see it more as a complimentary practice in the first instance. Basically opening up courses a lot more, enabling self directed learners to have as much access as is possible.

A lot of people think that making resources available is all that is possible. Personally I don't think that goes anywhere near far enough. The Internet is chock full of resources for that type of learning, but scarce in availability of real contact and support.

I think that in many cases it is possible for a person who teaches something face to face, to also support people online. That person may use strategies such as establishing the class as a support group for people online. I look at the opportunities to communicate wider than a little class as a rather rich learning opportunity - so look at it as a learning resource.

In the long run, the class model has to go. It may well turn out that the teacher becomes a mobile teacher, where someone coordinates a visit by that teacher, and the teacher maintains a strong online presence to both support distance learners, and to market themselves in the process.

As for you final query - I'm not sure how the model I propose can't be adjusted to accommodate this need.

micropedagogical dump #1 – Brent Simpson

<http://pedagogyofthecompressed.blogspot.com/2006/10/micropedagogical-dump-1.html>



<http://flickr.com/photos/bee/253881877/>

micropedagogies - mobile pedagogies adjusting to shifting environments, landscapes, users, locations, devices. As opposed to 'grand narrative' pedagogies. users/learners/students provide the input. Pedagogies that emerge in response to environments: a vestibular system⁶⁰ for learning situations.

Instead of grand narratives of teaching and learning, pedagogies emerge as far more mobile and fluent adjustments towards environments and user/learner demands or requirements. A range of strategies and tactics enable the teacher/facilitator in this approach to guide learning environments towards efficacy and to spin the technologies provided by many sources towards the learning experience. The teacher is a technologist (this is not new - they always have been!)

An example: Flickr - the popular image sharing site provides a range of fairly simple tools for the upload,

⁶⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vestibular_system

tagging and simple manipulation of images and text. It also provides an environment for adding notes, comments, starting groups/discussions and supplying licensing on user generated content. There are multiple ways in which Flickr may be used as an environment to generate discussion, learning, creation. Pedagogical approaches (learning designs?) towards an environment like Flickr become valuable approaches that can be shared amongst teachers (without all that pesky XML!). A pedagogy of the compressed.

Comments on micropedagogical dump #1

Leigh Blackall said...

Yes indeed Brent. I think your thinking here fits everything we have been discussing. Here's my attempt at a model⁶¹, using your microcontent idea, Konrad's progressive discourse, and Stephen's world view of education...

Alex Hayes said...

Beer.

The pedagogy of the compressed has now gone micro no less. We need to better understand your pedagogical referent here Brent lest it be lost in the annals of the bright-ideas basket.

I'd really like to know more of what you've coined compressed because in all the ramblings of the connectivist vs. the constructivists and beyond - your musings on the new and progressive micro-movable and sometimes self assigned model is more fitting for my learners than any other I know.

I like your ideas. I need to love them to keep coining the pedagogy of the compressed.

Lets make it cool for school.

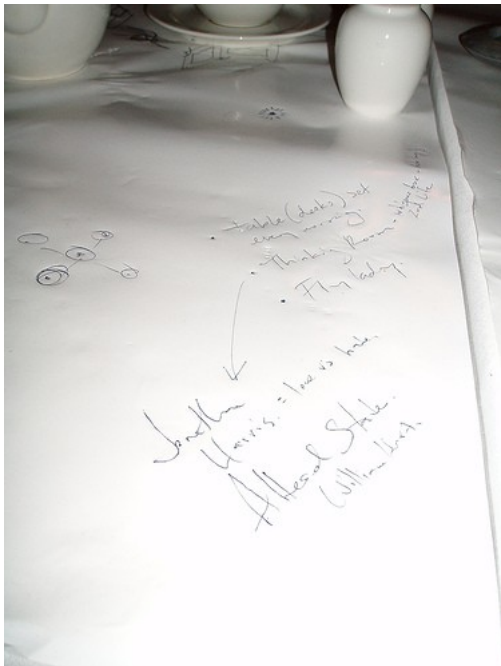
Martin Linder said...

micropedagogies, microcontent ... hey, may i point you all to our Microlearning2007 conference? see <http://www.microlearning.org>. OK, it is at the other side of the world, in Austria, but i really would love to discuss this there.

61 <http://teachandlearnonline.blogspot.com/2006/10/what-would-it-be-like-to-be-rain.html>

FLNW thoughts – Email discussion through the FLNW email list by various authors

http://groups.google.com/group/futureoflearning/browse_frm/thread/8c083bcb74969fc5/28a2f8163d32ebdf?vc=1#28a2f8163d32ebdf



<http://flickr.com/photos/leighblackall/251000308/>

Mark Nichols

Sean,

Likewise enjoyed dinner with you – no indigestion, but I suspect the beef lasagne was probably just nuked rather than specially prepared! Besides, why talk shop when getting to know one another is much more important? Your Burning Man photos were a far better use of RL time!

I agree with most of your points but wanted to mention the significance of my email footer (“Develop for the maximum common denominator”). I see this as a progressive activity, as my role expects me to bring all people on board with e-learning to a certain level (see ‘core and custom’ earlier). It doesn’t mean that I limit people from going further with e-learning should they want to, nor that I withhold my support to them. BTW - I have another email footer that reads, “Unfortunately for human progress it is easier to throw stones than to stack them” (made that one up myself).

Some last thoughts. Firstly, in what sense does being in a class group require you to ‘conform’? Does that mean not be different in terms of what you learn, or conformity in terms of who you are? If you have different ideas to what you’re being taught, it could be a good opportunity to reevaluate your own ideas. I know in my undergraduate days I thought I knew more than I did. At that stage conforming to

the ideas presented made good sense. Only later did I develop a sufficient framework to be critical – and I was rebuked in my PG days for not being critical enough!

Secondly, you note that the education sector is “behind others when it comes to adopting the new technologies and accompanying paradigms that come with them.” Yep, sure is! But other sectors are able to point toward clear efficiency and effectiveness gains. Research on this area for education tends to be conflicting; real gains are only made when a programmatic approach is taken, hence my own focus on programmes moreso than individuals (making sure that they are not lost in the process, of course). I am yet to see hard data on whether or not Web 2.0 learning really DOES improve outcomes or reduce costs. If

anyone is aware of research on this, PLEASE let me know.

Perhaps there's something to be said for anticipating learners' own development, rather than assuming all learners want to learn informally and in emancipated settings. After all, that's what effective pedagogy – and my role – is all about.

Mark.

Sean FitzGerald

Nichols, Mark wrote:

Some last thoughts. Firstly, in what sense does being in a class group require you to 'conform'? Does that mean not be different in terms of what you learn, or conformity in terms of who you are?

In the sense that Stephen talks about in that there is a pressure to fit into the group and engage in group think. But I was more reacting to what I thought "Develop for the maximum common denominator" meant, because it sounded to me like developing curriculum that wouldn't allow for individual differences and preferences.

If you have different ideas to what you're being taught, it could be a good opportunity to reevaluate your own ideas.

Or it may be that your ideas are better than your teacher's! I don't mean to sound arrogant - I often change my views on things, but I generally tend to do a lot of research on a topic or subject before I form an opinion. I read widely including opposing views, so I feel I can defend my position. I've had plenty of occasions where I have disagreed with my teachers and have found plenty of support for my position outside the classroom. There seems to be a disturbing implication in your statement that we should defer to the teacher's position. I think what tends to happen is a teacher assumes a certain authority simply because they hold the position of teacher – an authority that is supported by institutions, and often projected onto the teacher by the students themselves.

I am yet to see hard data on whether or not Web 2.0 learning really DOES improve outcomes or reduce costs. If anyone is aware of research on this, PLEASE let me know.

This sort of research is not really my area, but I am reminded of how mainstream Western medicine doesn't, and likely will never, accept homeopathy, Traditional Chinese Medicine and other forms of alternative therapies. Western medicine considers itself scientific and insists research must follow the scientific method. Their method of testing treatments is to use the double blind method where they divide a group of people with the same illness/condition into two and give one half the treatment (such as a drug) and the other half a placebo. If the half with the treatment fares better than the the half with the placebo, the treatment is considered effective.

But with homeopathy, TCM and other forms of natural therapy the practitioner examines the individual patient and their individual symptoms and prescribes a treatment unique to that individual patient, their symptoms and their circumstances. Thus these treatments can never be tested using the double blind method, so there can never be statistical evidence or proof that the treatment works, but there are millions of

practitioners and patients who can attest to their efficacy.

Perhaps there's something to be said for anticipating learners' own development, rather than assuming all learners want to learn informally and in emancipated settings. After all, that's what effective pedagogy -- and my role -- is all about.

I think sometimes people think that we are advocating a total abandonment of any type of structure or scaffolding to education, with students left completely to their own devices. I'm not suggesting that myself. I'm suggesting that perhaps the scaffolding and the underlying educational philosophy can change so that the learner is more responsible for and much more in control of their learning journey and learning choices. Some of those choices would include self-directed learning and some would include taking advantage of formal education (and I mean this in the sense of with the guidance and support of some sort of educator/teacher/mentor/facilitator) opportunities when they recognise for themselves the need for some guidance and structure. As I mentioned in an earlier email - I'd be happy to go along to a structured course on Photoshop. I accept that often I don't know what I don't know and that having the guidance of someone knowledgeable in an area can be useful.

Sean

Stephen Downes

Hiya,

Nichols, Mark wrote:

Some last thoughts. Firstly, in what sense does being in a class group require you to 'conform'? Does that mean not be different in terms of what you learn, or conformity in terms of who you are

I was puzzled when I first read this (not sure where the email went – I am digging out from a massive email load - connectivity in SA and NZ was uniformly bad and my email services did not respond well).

I mean - has he not noticed that the entire concept of the class is based on conformity?

- same start time, same place, same level of work, same subject, same duration, same method of instruction, same texts and resources, same demonstrations of achievements...

And that's before we get into things like school uniforms, peer pressure, cultural norms and more.

I was told to sit down and shut up so often it's now my natural reaction any time i sense a teacher is in the room. The classroom as the cultivator of difference? hah!

If you have different ideas to what you're being taught, it could be a good opportunity to reevaluate your own ideas.

Well yeah - in the sense that you will discard them entirely or risk being failed. This isn't so bad in higher education (though it still exists) but is pervasive in K-12.

I am yet to see hard data on whether or not Web 2.0 learning really DOES improve outcomes or reduce costs. If anyone is aware of research on this, PLEASE let me know.

I have written extensively and in detail on the folly of research in this area. See http://www.acm.org/ubiquity/views/v4i25_downes.html

That said, there is ample evidence from other domains. Kids memorizing Myst maps, solving complex problems in WoW, learning entire Pokémon sets, etc. There is plenty of evidence there, if people would only look.

Perhaps there's something to be said for anticipating learners' own development, rather than assuming all learners want to learn informally and in emancipated settings. After all, that's what effective pedagogy - and my role - is all about.

Anticipating needs is good. When kids - or adults - /ask/ for help, you should be ready. Like the Fire Department.

But your solution is more akin to breaking down the door and hosing down the entire house in anticipation of the fire you're sure they'll have. The tactic might prevent fires (that's what 'research' would show) but is otherwise useless and ineffective. Not to mention damaging.

I'm surprised all this is still at issue. Maybe I've isolated myself too much, because the reaction in recent days shows it is, very much so. But I am waiting for a well argued defense of the current system, one that goes beyond "that's what we do now".

-- Stephen

Nichols, Mark

Hi Sean,

We're largely in agreement. I'm not advocating deferral to the teacher's position (and any academic in my College would be absolutely shocked at the thought!)

Sean wrote:

Or it may be that your ideas are better than your teacher's! I don't mean to sound arrogant - I often change my views on things, but I generally tend to do a lot of research on a topic or subject before I form an opinion. I read widely including opposing views, so I feel I can defend my position. I've had plenty of occasions where I have disagreed with my teachers and have found plenty of support for my position outside the classroom. There seems to be a disturbing implication in your statement that we should defer to the teacher's position. I think what tends to happen is a teacher assumes a certain authority simply because they hold the position of teacher - an authority that is supported by institutions, and often projected onto the teacher by the students themselves.

In that case you're the sort of learner any academic here would be proud to be involved with, and the sort of learner my colleagues here are trying so hard to develop. Not all academics are power hungry, and it is a mistake to paint all with the same brush (not suggesting that you're doing that BTW). I suspect that many posts criticising formal educators are actually targeting straw 'people' (we're very PC in NZ). Not every educator is authoritarian or unprofessional to the extent that "my word goes". Of course, Mr Grogan in Form Five was an obvious exception from my own life... but he is overshadowed by many broad-minded and continuously curious academics that have made the biggest contribution to my own development. I'm certainly an independent learner, but I always seek to be informed by others. This is the underpinning goal of PG Ed.

these treatments can never be tested using the double blind method, so there can never be statistical evidence or proof that the treatment works, but there are millions of practitioners and patients who can attest to their efficacy.

I don't know enough here to comment with any authority, but my suspicion is that tests have been performed. Isn't the 'placebo effect' cited as a reason for their success? Apologies to anyone involved in alternative therapies, please blame my own ignorance for any offence caused by that statement!

I think sometimes people think that we are advocating a total abandonment of any type of structure or scaffolding to education, with students left completely to their own devices. I'm not suggesting that myself. I'm suggesting that perhaps the scaffolding and the underlying educational philosophy can change so that the learner is more responsible for and much more in control of their learning journey and learning choices. Some of those choices would include self-directed learning and some would include taking advantage of formal education (and I mean this in the sense of with the guidance and support of some sort of educator/teacher/mentor/facilitator) opportunities when they recognise for themselves the need for some guidance and structure.

Your first sentence captured my concerns, so I appreciate your statement here. IMHO PG education is particular is well on the route of SDL you suggest. Perhaps we all have more in common than we first thought.

A man is what he thinks about all day long.

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

This resulted in a scary ontological realisation that I probably won't thank you for! I'm hoping Emerson is wrong.

Best,

Mark.

Leigh Blackall

Most of the lecturers I have met, both as a student and in my career, ARE extremely authoritarian. Its not intentional in some cases, in most cases its just a necessity. Dealing with people as individuals soon

becomes very inefficient within the current system, and eventually most people just want their job to be simple and reliable.

I would like to see a social experiment conducted.

Take 40 people off the street.

Split them into 4 groups of 10... no! lets make it more realistic, 2 groups of 20

call 1 person in each group a teacher, pay that one person handsomely, ask the others to pay money

say to the others, "before you can earn money like your teacher you must learn this this and this from your teacher"

then watch what happens.

Even without the money bit, I would anticipate results similar to that experiment when prison guard and prisoner uniforms were handed out.

Its not the fault of the individuals, though being aware of the behavior could help, it is much broader than that. Something even the most progressive teacher struggles with.

Nichols, Mark

Thanks Stephen. I read your paper, and enjoyed your perspective. Your closing comment "students are already voting with their feet" probably holds the way forward. Empirical studies are one currency of HE institutions; another other is market forces!

Comparison studies in formal education contexts (which are certainly irrelevant under the paradigm you are suggesting) are very inconclusive and contradictory (see for example DiBiase, 2000; Lazarus , 2003; Shaw & Young 2003, Spector, 2005; Tomei, 2006, references available). More work needs to be done here if the aim is to transform HE practice (which is not a goal you would be interested in regardless). Perhaps it is market forces that hold the key to the paradigm shift you desire; if 'non-institutions' (not sure of a better term - I use that one in ignorance) were to develop effective learners that became sought-after by employers, HE institutions would either adapt or die (and I'm sure you wouldn't be mourning at the funeral!)

Until then, I for one need to be pragmatic. Opting out and resigning will not help anyone, even though it seemed to be your advice at the eFest keynote! I would be very interested in any writings you have prepared from a more metaphysical perspective, because I suspect it is there where we will find the terminology for more productive discourse. I think that philosophy is the correct arena for this discussion, as your ideas are very much deeper than discussion at this level can expose.

Stephen wrote:

*I mean - has he not noticed that the entire concept of the class is based on conformity?
same start time, same place, same level of work, same subject, same duration, same
method of instruction, same texts and resources, same demonstrations of achievements...*

This overstates the issue I think. In K12 contexts it is far more true than in PG education ones, which is my

immediate area of concern. I would replace the word 'conformity' with 'critical alignment' as it seems less sociologically charged. The goal of HE is to have people think as experts think rather than to think what experts think, and there is plenty of evidence in this group that higher educators have largely succeeded. We're all individuals, and none of you are 'conforming' across the board. Neither am I. If the issue is really about K12, then let's be straight up about that rather than painting all formal education as being deficient.

I'm enjoying this prying open of things - thanks for humouring me. I'm learning heaps.

Mark.

Stephen Downes

Nichols, Mark wrote:

Thanks Stephen. I read your paper, and enjoyed your perspective. Your closing comment "students are already voting with their feet" probably holds the way forward. Empirical studies are one currency of HE institutions; another other is market forces!

Market 'forces' is a misnomer. What we see in the market is an effect, not a cause.

Comparison studies in formal education contexts (which are certainly irrelevant under the paradigm you are suggesting) are very inconclusive and contradictory (see for example DiBiase, 2000; Lazarus, 2003; Shaw & Young 2003, Spector, 2005; Tomei, 2006, references available). More work needs to be done here if the aim is to transform HE practice (which is not a goal you would be interested in regardless).

Hm. As I read what you have written, you are recommending more irrelevant work. Why?

I would change HE practice if I could. But it's the sort of effort that reaches diminishing returns very quickly. People are constantly trying to steer you back to 'the institutional context' and 'the reality we work with'. They are saying that these things simply can't be changed. Well, if that's their attitude, and if after a certain point they tune out, there's not much point in continuing.

When asked where we will see the changes first, I always reply, "outside the institution." because, empirically, that's where they always occur first. When asked how to effect change I tell people, "Do it outside the institution, and make it so compelling the institutions are forced to accept it."

Similarly, while most change agents say "You have to get executive and management buy-in" I demur. These people will never buy into significant change - after all, they are doing very well in the current system; they're in charge. I have been saying recently, "to have a revolution, you don't change the government, you change the people." My focus is (to some degree) the teachers and (to a much larger degree) the students. I think the leaders and executives are almost irrelevant - even when you finally get someone supportive in place, they think they're in charge?

It's the Reign of Terror all over again.

Perhaps it is market forces that hold the key to the paradigm shift you desire; if 'non-institutions' (not sure of a better term – I use that one in ignorance) were to develop effective learners that became sought-after by employers, HE institutions would either

adapt or die (and I'm sure you wouldn't be mourning at the funeral!)

Well what I would actually prefer to see is a parallel publicly-funded system of informal learning developed, a system that would allow people to learn on their own and that could be tapped into by traditional institutions, if they choose.

As for HE institutions, well, I've always held that the purpose of the education system isn't to support HE institutions, even if that's where most of them place their priorities. Keeping venerable universities around has history and value (and it seems a shame to waste such nice buildings). But not at the expense of education.

Until then, I for one need to be pragmatic.

That's a crock. From my perspective you are being the least pragmatic of all, contributing to a vast wastage of educational funds and resources in order to support an obsolete system. What you *mean* is "I need to be *safe*." But even that is a false security - just ask newspaper writers! - unless you are reasonably close to retirement.

Opting out and resigning will not help anyone, even though it seemed to be your advice at the eFest keynote!

Do I look like I have opted out and resigned? I am /very/ involved in education. I offer learning to thousands of people every day. I inform public policy. I develop software and other applications, work on system and learning theory, meet with people almost every day, and more.

My way is not the easy way of 'opting out', no matter how you wish to characterize it. Not even slightly.

Again - it's this false dichotomy between 'the institution' and 'chaos'. There is a middle way, the network way, and I have not merely been talking about it, I have been living it for the last decade.

I would be very interested in any writings you have prepared from a more metaphysical perspective, because I suspect it is there where we will find the terminology for more productive discourse. I think that philosophy is the correct arena for this discussion, as your ideas are very much deeper than discussion at this level can expose.

I should probably one day prepare again a volume of my collected writings. I have found recently that my discussions of people have been based on a fragmentary exposure to my views, mostly because there's no easy way to access a lot of this. It doesn't help that my earlier, philosophical, writings are mostly offline.

I mean - has he not noticed that the entire concept of the class is based on conformity? same start time, same place, same level of work, same subject, same duration, same method of instruction, same texts and resources, same demonstrations of achievements...

This overstates the issue I think.

How so?. Support this! Which of the types of sameness I have listed does not exist?

In K12 contexts it is far more true than in PG education ones, which is my immediate area of concern. I would replace the word 'conformity' with 'critical alignment' as it seems less sociologically charged.

If you mean the same thing, I will adduce the same objections.

The goal of HE is to have people think as experts think rather than to think what experts think, and there is plenty of evidence in this group that higher educators have largely succeeded.

Can't speak for NZ, but in 'the most advanced educational system in the world' (so I am frequently informed) a significant number of people still think there's no global warming, still think Iraq was involved in 9-11, and still think the world is 5,000 years old. I don't define that as success.

We're all individuals, and none of you are 'conforming' across the board. Neither am I. If the issue is really about K12, then let's be straight up about that rather than painting all formal education as being deficient.

In the population as a whole - including the educated population - there are unacceptable levels of learned helplessness, willful ignorance, and purposeful blindness. The evidence for this is overwhelming - we can examine any newspaper from any city and view it for ourselves. Some people (such as Chomsky) have taken governments and the education system to task for certain aspects of it. But the malaise is pervasive.

Using the independence of the people here as evidence that the people here are wrong is about as ironic and cynical as you can get.

In all seriousness - a lot depends on us being successful here. The world will not survive the current educational system. We are being locked into an educational disposition that will walk us collectively off the cliff. Surely you've noticed this?

-- Stephen

p.s.

I'm enjoying this prying open of things - thanks for humouring me. I'm learning heaps.

It's my pleasure, but I caution that the volume of posts here is temporary, as I have the luxury of a few hours, and a new energy that will be more directed as time goes by.

Nichols, Mark

Hello Stephen,

the volume of posts here is temporary, as I have the luxury of a few hours, and a new energy that will be more directed as time goes by

Then let me make the most of the opportunity! You mentioned what you would like to see, and I am VERY interested to explore this further:

what I would actually prefer to see is a parallel publicly-funded system of informal learning developed, a system that would allow people to learn on their own and that could be tapped into by traditional institutions, if they choose.

Please elaborate on how you would see this working, in as much detail as your luxury of time will allow. This is the level of discussion that I think would be very useful - you have a very rich conceptual framework, and I am curious as to how you would pour the concrete, so to speak.

That's a crock. From my perspective you are being the least pragmatic of all, contributing to a vast wastage of educational funds and resources in order to support an obsolete system. What you mean is "I need to be safe."

In my own defence, I do NOT mean 'safe'. I meant what I said, and I am aware of the distinction between terms. I still put up with the knocks of traditional educators reluctant to see things anew. Networked learning may well be the answer, and as it emerges I will be an active advocate. But for better or for worse, through reasons of choice or non-choice, people still demand formal education and I for one believe it still makes a positive societal difference. My role is not a waste of funds, otherwise (and please accept that I do have at least a shred of integrity!) I would not be here. As mentioned earlier, I am supporting traditional evolution rather than punctuated equilibrium. Whether Charles Darwin or Stephen Jay Gould were correct, both point toward progress within the evolutionary framework (advocating the concept rather than the theory BTW).

I have found recently that my discussions of people have been based on a fragmentary exposure to my views, mostly because there's no easy way to access a lot of this. It doesn't help that my earlier, philosophical, writings are mostly offline.

There would be great value in such a compilation. I am one with fragmentary exposure to your views, and as I have suggested it is at the philosophical level that productive discourse is likely to be found. At this level we tend to scratch the same issues yet never really address the itch.

Anyway, my real interest is in your publicly funded system. Please do elaborate if you have the time; you have my sincere attention and interest.

Best,

Mark.

Stephen Downes

what I would actually prefer to see is a parallel publicly-funded system of informal learning developed, a system that would allow people to learn on their own and that could be tapped into by traditional institutions, if they choose.

Please elaborate on how you would see this working, in as much detail as your luxury of time will allow. This is the level of discussion that I think would be very useful – you have a very rich conceptual framework, and I am curious as to how you would pour the concrete, so to speak.

Stephen Downes: 10:12:35

"So, now, how do we build a text this way. " - this is putting walls around it - but you need walls around it?

dave cormier 10:12:53

i need a new word

the word text does carry its old meaning

hence the talk of neologisms that follows

Stephen Downes: 10:14:02

yeah

dave cormier 10:14:04

but unless your going to start the 'everything forever ever' you

need to put a boundary somewhere

Stephen Downes: 10:14:45

well -- it's like grass

or the earth

dave cormier 10:15:03

the kind you walk on or... the other kind

Stephen Downes: 10:15:10

the kind you walk on

dave cormier 10:16:00

how so?

Stephen Downes: 10:16:42

well - I was thinking - somebody asked me to talk about what I meant

by my alternative of schools and classes

This would be an alternative to texts as well

And I was thinking about how I would frame that

as though I were doing a video

and the way I was thinking, I said (in my thinking, I haven;t
written this) is that there would be two parts...

the first would be like the earth

dave cormier 10:18:21

ok

Stephen Downes: 10:18:40

and then the camera would pan down, and you'd see the earth, then the image would face to a diagram, of a whole bunch of connected entities, then to a whole series of connected wires, then to the earth again

so think of it as though it were this underlying layer, a network of multiple intermixed resources, all connected to each other, all stretching out into every direction

That's the first part

dave cormier 10:20:09

reminds me of the interconnected basement analogy for quantum physics

Stephen Downes: 10:20:16

Then the second part are the individual things that grow out of the earth

each one interacts with a different part of that substructure, and both adds to it and draws from it

these are individual instances of learning - like learning tools, say - things that interact with you and interact with this substructure

dave cormier 10:21:34

i follow...

Stephen Downes: 10:22:03

the 'learning' is always there, it's like this constantly existing substrate, constantly in motion, always with new resources being added and shifted about

dave cormier 10:22:49

this is a nice model for the super secret project that's going on at the university that I'm going to try and introduce you to when

you're here

Stephen Downes: 10:22:51

the 'education' is a particular application drawing from the learning, providing an interface to this substrate - a resource, a reference, an activity, something your personal robot-buddy says, the recipes on your jars of jam, etc

dave cormier 10:23:09

they have good intentions... but not the breadth of experience necessary to really push the 'limits' of learning
That's a big model stephen

Stephen Downes: 10:23:43

That's the model - that's why it always bugs me when people talk about the 'traditional context' - because nothing in that stops them from working on this
that's *the* model
everything else is an intermediate step
what else would we be leading toward?
people haven't grasped what happens when we have an ubiquitous network

dave cormier 10:24:47

back to a learning model that is directly connected to its purpose
but your saying we already have one

Stephen Downes: 10:25:05

(I'm going to clip and paste this to the flnw email forum, where I was asked this... so I don't have to type it twice)
sorry, don't get that question?

dave cormier 10:25:25

and that the only real model for 'the network' is the only large one we have that works

the earth itself

or have i followed your metaphor too far?

Stephen Downes: 10:26:09

ah, yes, of course

this is what I saw in tasmania

"If we can revise our attitudes towards the land under our feet, if we can accept a role of steward, and depart from the role of conqueror, if we can accept the view than man and nature are inseparable parts of the unified whole - then Tasmania can be a shining beacon in a dull, uniform, and largely artificial world."

Olegas Truchanas, 1971.

posted on a building in Strahan

dave cormier 10:27:37

very nice.

so i do understand your metaphor

Stephen Downes: 10:27:53

<http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/page.cgi?post=20>

yes

The rest of the model is just details... how do the bits of underlying infrastructure work together, how do applications grow out of it, how do we use these in particular circumstances, how does stuff get fed into it, all of that

dave cormier 10:33:47

[10:29:42 AM] Nancy White says: Do you know about fairy rings? Fungus

[10:30:10 AM] Nancy White says: All the structural growth is underground, out of site. The fruiting bodies (the mushrooms) show up in this amazing order that appears to be magical

[10:30:17 AM] Nancy White says: but it isn't. Its the rhizomes

[10:30:46 AM] Nancy White says: It is both structure and randomness

both. It is not either or

[10:30:47 AM] dave cormier says: it is the rhizomes

[10:30:56 AM] Nancy White says: It is tension used creatively, not

battled

no sense re-writing it

Nancy is great.

Stephen Downes: 10:36:48

Yeah, I like that

Leigh Blackall

Thanks for this Stephen. I waited with held breath for this, it is an inspiring description. I made an attempt at taking this further, or grounding it in a scenario that partly explains a model I am thinking about. *What would it be like to be the rain*, extends on the idea about umbrellas I put out a few days days ago.

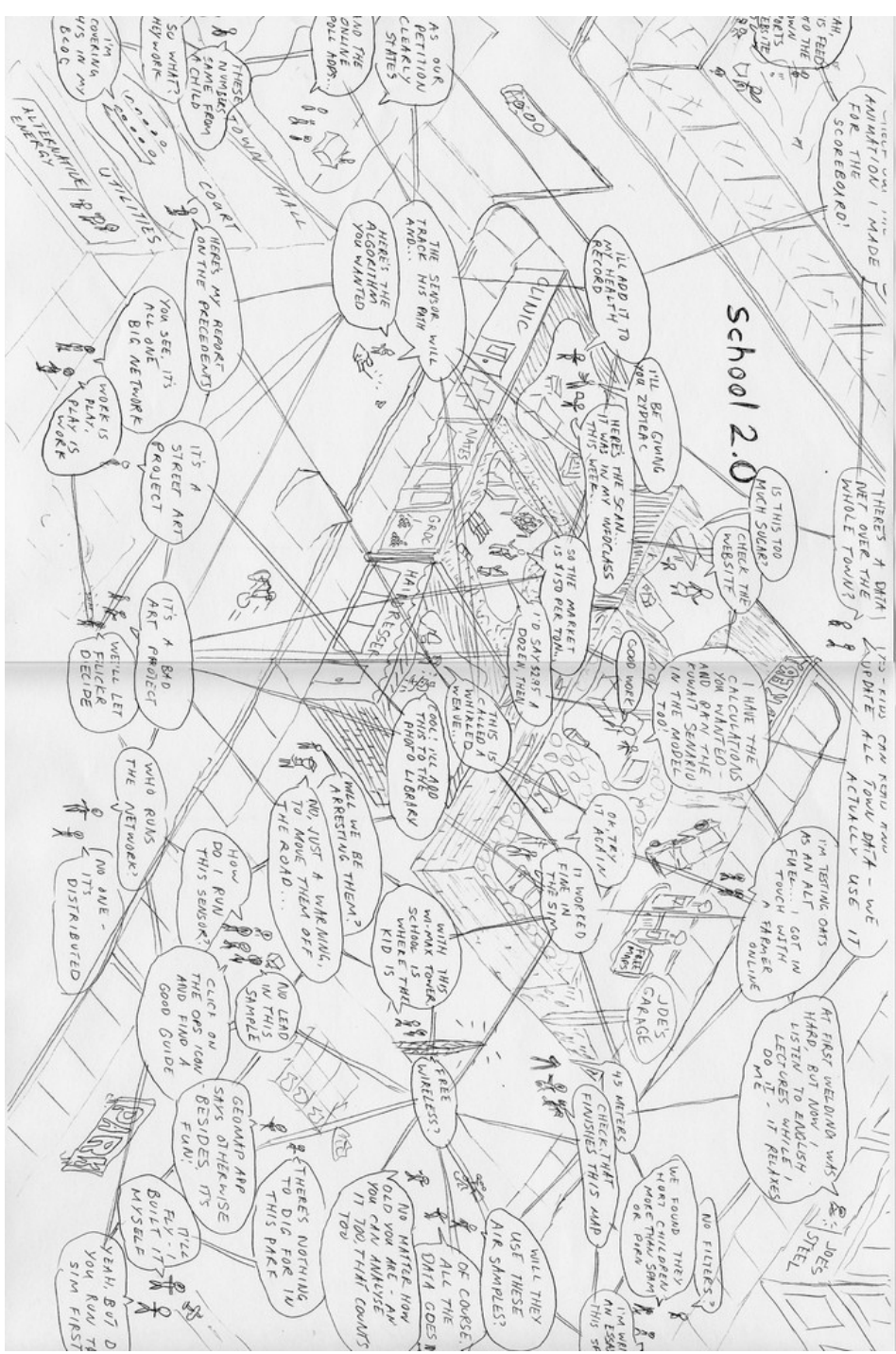


Illustration on previous page: http://www.flickr.com/photos/stephen_downes/268691876/

“Porn, piracy, spam and wackos”: Embracing the dangers of openness and the potential of closedness - Artichoke

http://artichoke.typepad.com/artichoke/2006/10/porn_piracy_spa.html

May I speak English?

Are you licensed to speak English?

What licence agreement do you have for the English you are speaking?

My students are speaking English 0.5 but I'm speaking English 1.0 “

The “When we speak English we don't have to ask permission” thinking of Jamie Boyle⁶²
Co-Director of the Center for the Study of the Public Domain at Duke Law School,

I have spent the past fortnight playing (e)learning “snak(e)s and ladd(e)rs with greased rungs” mind games⁶³

The catalyst for this slippery pursuit was some ever patient yet persistent cognitive undermining by cj about ICT and teaching and learning, the FLNW google group email conversations and posts from Stephen Downes about groups and networks.

It will probably turn out to be “technological hubris”, but I reckon I have never been closer to picking up Pratchett's “Do Not Achieve Transcendence but Go Straight to Oblivion” card.

I find that despite the fact that “I'm just a soul whose intentions are good” I know, zero, nada, nothing, zip, zilch, squat, nix, naught, NOTHING about what's important in information communication technology. And to make it worse, I find that I have not even been asking the right questions for the past three years.

It is quite a glorious thought moment - when you realise that in trying to un valorise all that “elearning has the potential to transform the way we learn in schools”⁶⁴ you have been focussing in a determined and dogged way on quite the wrong level, at stuff that is quite silly. My excuse - I have been distracted from the main game by the chanting robots, and once distracted too easily slipped from the greasy rungs into the chameleon sham of the ministerial nebula.

*Are we there yet? Captain's log star date 2247: mission to integrate computers into classrooms.
We have left the dark planet leaving behind the army of robots chanting "integrate", "we are just*

62 <http://media-cyber.law.harvard.edu/Beyond%20Broadcast%202006/Boyle.mp4>

63 <http://www.au.ispace.org/books/pqf/wyrd-sisters.html>

64 <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=10475&indexid=1024&indexparentid=1072>

tools", "learn for constructivism's sake" and seek refuge in the ministerial nebula, famous for it's sweeping vistas of rapidly changing colours and shapes. The Sceptica call it chameleon sham. Out of the sparkling distraction a new planet emerges. It is a wobbly planet, covered in long white mist. Beam me down Arti! (cj 12.9.06)

Well I'm not there yet, but I am on my way - Doc Searl's presentation⁶⁵ loosened my focus on the sparkling distraction and James Boyle's Keynote Presentation: Reinventing the Gatekeeper - Beyond Broadcast 2006-10-08 Reinventing Public Media in a Participatory Culture allowed me a glimpse of the new planet.

Boyle is majestic – I can taste the wobbliness of the new planet, I can feel the dampness of the long white mist, but I've only just started to tease out these ideas and their implication for the work I do in education.

Boyle argues "We have an inability to see clearly the potential of commons based production" because

1. We are very bad at predicting the future and
2. We are not rational in our economic decision making – we are hugely risk adverse.

In any system [be it content generation – network design – individual organisation] when we think about how to generate cultural content – what should be owned, controlled, permitted etc – we tilt towards ideas of "protection, enclosure, closedness, property and proprietariness rather than openness"

He suggests that the way we think about "property" is still deeply encoded in the physical, the tangible, the limited. And we do this thinking at an economic and visceral level. Our assumptions about control and design "are built around a set of experiences of the world that by and large are material, and not digital." We find it very hard to understand that it is difficult to overfish/ deplete an idea

We suffer from a "cognitive blindness" in overestimating risks – but fortunately we are wrong by inclination, we are wrong in predictable ways, so that when we are aware of this cognitive skew we have the ability to factor it into our thinking. So what should we do to compensate for this bias

1. Make sure that you leave as open as possible for as long as possible the construction design systems under which you are working.
2. Make sure as many different kinds of feedback come to you which can allow the eyes of others to see the potential of that you don't
3. Wherever it is possible push a little bit on just how much control is needed

And why should we? –

Boyle asks his audience to imagine that they didn't know anything about the history of the past 14 years, and then imagine how they would create a great encyclopedia? They all agree there would be controls, experts, supervision, validation, copyright, trademark, and branding ...you would never imagine that anyone, anywhere in the world might contribute content at anytime without any incentive, and for free

When it comes to imagining open networks "we are wrong by inclination". Think this is the cause of the tension in the groups versus network dialogue on the FLNW google group. Our inclination is to see only the dangers of openness and the potential of closedness, which means we kneecap the opportunity and

⁶⁵ <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/mediaberkman/2006/09/20/doc-searls-on-the-giant-zero/>

possibility of openness by inclination.

If we don't listen more carefully to thinkers like Searl, Boyle and Downes I predict that in one thousand year times we will be talking like Futurama's Fry

Fry: Wow. I love you guys. Back in the 20th century, I had all five of your albums.

Ad-Rock: That was a thousand years ago. Now we got seven.

Fry: Cool. Can I borrow the new ones. And a couple of blank tapes?

Futurama Fry (talking to the Beastie Boys)

[And yes I am aware of the absurdity of ending a post like this with a futuristic prediction - is part of the delicious internal inconsistency of the Artichokean mind]

Comments to “Porn, piracy, spam and wackos”: Embracing the dangers of openness and the potential of closedness

CJ

You Arti are a wonderful instance of "open source" stuff. More importantly, rather than just producing more stuff, you actually craft points of view, ways to make sense of all the noise. Point of view, expertise, place to stand, as an old West Coast hippie whose name escapes me right now, argued that this would be the most valuable thing in a world awash with info, folk who could help map the space, help folk learn how to make their own maps.... (fumbles to turn off creaky old metaphor but fails). It's a fine line but I know in my own institution folk are still trapped in a 70's practice..gotta give em content, which means making it in forms that will be edible, instead of teaching 'em how to hunt in bit space, and not just sit in a search engine and try and stuff their heads with whatever comes across the screen.

Learning should be free, its an education that can cost – Leigh Blackall

<http://teachandlearnonline.blogspot.com/2006/01/learning-should-be-free-its-education.html>

I've used that line a few times before, but never, as far as I can remember, in this blog. Its an idea that's pretty simple, but an idea that I feel needs more discussion.

Before the Internet, there were/are libraries... Libraries were a place I used to go to do a school assignment. I'd browse the card index for my topic, take a pile of books to a quiet corner, and start reading, noting, photocopying, and revisiting the library index. Anyone could walk into almost any library and do this. There's still not much stopping your average Joe from walking in off the street, and into the university library, sitting in a quiet corner somewhere and learning. That Joe could even sit in on a few of the lectures going on at that uni if he/she was bold enough - most times the theatres are so huge, the only figure of authority in a lecture wouldn't have a clue! Not anymore, with the advent of learning management systems and digital resource repositories... more later.

This is how I learned to shoot and edit video in fact. When I was in art school, I wanted to do video, but the fees were too much, and I wasn't sure I'd see it through anyway. Instead of formally enrolling, I just fronted up for class.

My plan was that I'd attend as many lectures and tutorials as I could before getting found out. As it turned out, my lecturer didn't check my enrollment status until the end of the year, when it came time to mark the final works. He pulled me aside and explained to me that he couldn't give me a grade, or even credit me for doing the course because I was not enrolled. I explained to him that that was OK by me, and that I was grateful for everything I had learned.

Now, I realise many people might consider that steeling. In a sense I guess it was. But I sat in group sessions, I helped my class mates massage out an understanding and develop projects. I held the boom mics, and burned the mid night hours helping my class mates in the editing studios... do you see where I'm going? I would even go so far as to say I motivated the class somewhat, by organising film nights and social events. Did I pay my way then? Was I steeling?

Now days, the new libraries, the "resource repositories", the LMS courses, the closed universities, have shut that loop hole. Average Joe can't just walk in off the street and sit quietly in the corner of the library and learn. He/she has to first pay, enroll and get a login and password to do that. Bold average Joe can't sit in on lectures and tutorials (forums and online presentations) he/she needs that login again. Joe's opportunity to learn has been blocked. The more and more we digitise information and close it behind LMS servers, the more we shut out Average Joe, but who loses out? Its not like AJ can't learn somewhere else!

Back in 2003 (or was it early 2004) MIT started its open courseware initiative. For a while there, it generated quite a lot of attention, and certainly popularised the concept of open courseware. At least it did in my mind. At last there was something significant I could use to fight the rise of Intellectual Property and Copyright paranoia in Australian education. But early in 2005 I lost a job at a university for pushing too hard for open courseware. Since then I think I've avoided talking about the issue straight on, and instead tried to find a

concept that disrupted direction a little less.

But there's no avoiding it. Open courseware needs fighting for. Open courseware is an educational organisation's opportunity to fulfill its broader social responsibilities, at no extra cost. In fact I think its proven that open courseware saves money, maybe even makes money!

Let's take my video example, and lets suppose that what I did wasn't steeling at all, what I did was simply do the video course by open courseware. By the university making the video course open, I was able to access the texts, I was able to see the assignments, and even participate in class discussions, I was even allowed to work in productions! But, being an open courseware student, I wasn't able to have my work assessed, I wasn't able to access various other services offered by the university, I wasn't able to receive the piece of paper.

But later in life, I found myself a job in video production - you know - just holding the mic. But I really wanted to hold the camera. But to do that, I needed a qualification... through holding the mic, I managed to save enough money to pay the university to assess my work from the open course I did years ago. I paid the fee, did a little bit of gap training, and got the piece of paper. Now I'm a camera operator.

What about Average Joe. She's just an old lady who likes to keep abreast with anthropological studies. Its one of her many self directed intellectual pursuits. Open courseware gives her the opportunity to do just that, and even offer her insights and experience for the younger kids to consider when doing the course for the first time.

This post is getting pretty huge, so I won't type the 7 other scenarios for open courseware success.

Our universities, colleges, and even our schools are being reduced to overly simplified dollar value economics, when they obviously exchange much more than dollars. But I guess everything is being rationalised like that :(Intellectual property, copyright, digital rights management, learning management systems, and enrollment systems help to narrow our acceptance into these dollar units). As teachers or facilitators we need to consider the value of openness, accessibility, international participation, engagement, and transparency. Perhaps we need to put dollar values on it for this irrational world.. a Kyoto protocol for learning...

Here's 3 comic strip models I've already published before that fit this argument:

1. Pay it forward learning⁶⁶
2. Open courseware⁶⁷
3. LMS Comic⁶⁸

I'm currently working on some more.

And Teemu Leimonen of FLOSSE Posse recently posted his model for the Libre University:

A Libre University is a research and educational institution that is giving freedom for all to use, modify and redistribute the educational content used in the institution.

66 <http://flickr.com/photos/leighblackall/sets/1634027/>

67 <http://flickr.com/photos/leighblackall/sets/1602012/>

68 <http://flickr.com/photos/leighblackall/sets/1733041/>

Are you helping your organisation fulfill its broader (if somewhat ignored) social obligation?

Comments to Learning should be free, its an education that can cost

Bill Kerr said...

Great slides, good way to promote the concept!

Yes, I agree that it's very significant that MIT has released their courses to everyone.

Scroll down on this creative commons page⁶⁹ to see two other institutions doing the same as MIT.

Leigh Blackall said...

Great isn't it Bill.

I have been keeping track of the various open courseware initiatives and maybe even libre universities in delicious: <http://del.icio.us/leighblackall/OpenCourseWare>

perhaps, if you also use Delicious you could use this tag word, and if you come across something that rates as Libre, then use libreuniversity as well.

allan said...

Great post.

I've started an open university as a part time project.

<http://silentpc.org/university/simple.php>

It has so far to go.

What it does do is inspire some to learn.

about 50 free students so far.

Education can come later.

⁶⁹ <http://creativecommons.org/find/>

Professional Development for the Knowledge Era – Michael Coghlan

<http://flnwpd.wikispaces.com/Draft+Article+-+FLNW+as+PD+Model>



<http://flickr.com/photos/bee/248550956/>

"The sum of the expertise of the people in the audience is greater than the sum of expertise of the people on stage."⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Dave Winer; What is an Unconference? <http://scripting.wordpress.com/2006/03/05/what-is-an-unconference>

In September 2006 a group of people were invited to NZ to take part in the Future of Learning in a Networked World (FLNW). Sponsored by Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, FLNW was variously referred to as an unconference, an open space conference, a bar camp, or even a travelling elearning circus or roadshow. Invited participants mostly referred to it as an unconference - the prefix 'un' denoted a definitive contrast from the typical style of 'stand and deliver' professional development event that we were all familiar with.

Was it a plane? Was it a bird? No it was

What transpired in this 10 day event was actually a combination of unconference, open space, and bar camp. The notion of bar camp or unconference seems to have stemmed from a technological imperative. From Wikipedia: "BarCamp is an international network of unconferences — open, participatory workshop-events, whose content is provided by participants — focusing on early-stage web applications, and related open source technologies and social protocols."

The unconference: "An unconference is a conference where the content of the sessions is driven and created by the participants, generally day-by-day during the course of the event, rather than by a single organizer, or small group of organizers, in advance. FLNW was an 'open, participatory workshop event, where 'the content of the sessions (was) driven and created by participants'. It employed Open Space Technology (OST), a term that describes a process rather than the use of any particular technology:

"OST is a meeting methodology.... Its essential core is the invitation to take responsibility for what you have passion for. The remarkable outcome of this simple idea is that when participants do so, the needs of both the individual and the collective are met."

So was FLNW a barcamp, unconference, or an open space conference? It had elements of all three. This paper will refer to it as an unconference that employed open space processes. It was therefore

- open – it was free and all interested parties were invited
- fluid and negotiated – there was no set agenda

In the lead-up to the event sponsors and location hosts did express a desire for more structure up-front so they could more effectively promote the event. This created some tension in the group as some were very definite about the fact that there would be no pre-planning or prepared agenda. From the sponsors' point of view one can appreciate their dilemma. They were unsure about promoting the event as merely 'a group of visiting elearning experts will be here to talk about the future of learning', with no timetable or session titles. This highlights a subtle difference between a conference and an unconference. One promotes a conference; one should invite people to an unconference. It needs to be explicit that all-comers have equal rights of participation, and that everyone will help create the topics and organise sessions. They will be part of the show. It will in fact be their show - it's owned by those who attend.

For the most part those who favoured minimal planning had their way. However, the group may have erred in its reluctance to impose any structure on the process used to generate discussion topics. I think an agreed process would have been more effective in generating the foci of sessions, and may have resulted in more options for participants. Having to negotiate process and the range topics at the start of group sessions was a little confounding, but this path was taken in a kind of pioneering spirit. Like, 'let's see what happens if we leave it completely open?' And the group sessions were successful. It is only in retrospect that it is clear that there is twenty years of open space theory and practice that may have enabled FLNW to be more efficient in its use of planning time. Or unplanning time so to speak. One can devote a lot of time to debating why one

should not plan!

Locations

Over the course of 10 days FLNW travelled to 6 separate locations in NZ and took place on campuses, in museums, community centres, private homes, schools, trains, boats, planes, bars and restaurants. Most scheduled events were located in advertised venues like campuses and community spaces that could cater for up to 100 participants per session.

What happened in these sessions?

Initially a location facilitator would welcome everyone and introduce the international speakers, who in turn spoke briefly (mostly) about their areas of interest and expertise. The invited speakers were seated around the room, each with a laptop and data projector, and after these initial introductions participants were free to join any of the invited guests for an open discussion within their broad area of knowledge and expertise.

These sessions went very smoothly. Participants self-selected their chosen focus group and floated between groups as desired. There was no compulsion to stay with any one group for any length of time – in accordance with a core component of open space process: the Law of Two Feet. The Law of Two Feet - a foot of passion and a foot of responsibility -- expresses the core idea of taking responsibility for what you love. In practical terms, the law says that if you're neither contributing nor getting value where you are, use your two feet (or available form of mobility) and go somewhere where you can. (1)

"The phenomenon of self-organization lies at the heart of Open Space."

Owen compares this self-organization phenomenon with what Kaufmann suggests happens in the natural world. Kaufmann suggests that "self-organization will only occur if there are few prior connections between the elements, indeed he says no more than two. In retrospect, it seems to make sense. If everything is hardwired in advance how could it self organize?" How many of us at professional development events will automatically home in on people we know and sit with them in any group activity, rather than let the topic of the activity determine which group we should join?

Other types of events included a train ride of several hours duration where interested parties joined the touring guests for small group discussions on board, link-ups with international participants via virtual classroom tools, visits to schools and colleges, and a working breakfast.

The Process – An Evaluation

An event of this nature cannot help but have a profound effect on those involved. Its daring format with no set agendas or program other than a series of chosen locations geographically disparate on set days meant that the touring party were effectively together for several days at a time without a break. Many of the party had only met virtually before this event and as happens when any group of people is thrust together for days on end there were a range of interpersonal issues that arose that needed addressing. On the plus side of this forced continual companionship was the fact that this meant that the unconference became a 24/7 affair where issues raised in the sessions of the day could be discussed after hours over dinner or during transport

to the next port of call.

The nature of the content under review and the wired 'always-on'⁷¹ nature of the touring guests meant that there was an extraordinary amount of data recorded and posted on the Web. Discrete sets of this data can be accessed via RSS feed , and in the recently released ebook and dvd.

Though these interpersonal dynamics and the nature and volume of content produced are worth articles in their own right, it is the intention of this paper to focus more on the process of teaching and learning that occurred, evaluate its effectiveness, and assess the potential relevance of this type of professional development for the education sector. It should be said here that the sheer impracticality of the logistics of this kind of event make it unlikely that this model would be adopted by many organisations, but there is much that can be adopted for one or two day conferences. There was general consensus among the invited group that ten days was too long and that five days seemed an optimal amount of time. The length of the event clearly depends on the goals of the exercise. If one of the goals is to build individual capacity and confidence by drawing on group dynamics then an event of around five days may be necessary.

One of the intriguing aspects of FLNW was that it did require individual resolve to function effectively in the larger group, but this was not a stated goal of the event. It did however highlight the fact that working effectively in groups is not a given. It is a skill that needs to be learned. And not all members of the group saw working in groups as implicitly of value. Whether one sees value in working in groups, or is able to do it effectively has enormous implications for a group of educators ordaining collective, collaborative learning as a core requirement of learning in a connected world. There was vociferous debate on the nature and worth of groups and networks during FLNW, and for several weeks online after the physical event was over.

Group Sessions

The group sessions were surprisingly efficient and free of awkward pauses or leave-taking. Participants understood that they were free to change groups whenever they wished, and could join other discussions mid-stream in a free- flowing movement around the room as group sizes fluctuated between small gatherings of just a few people to groups of twenty or so. See Occasionally people in the shared space became aware of a particularly important or engaging discussion in one corner of the room and people would drift over to that part of the room to listen to the debate. This short movie from Derek Chirside⁷², our host in Christchurch from the then Christchurch College of Education (now part of the University of Canterbury), gives a glimpse of what typically happened during these concurrent smaller group sessions. This short movie from Steven Parker⁷³ asks the questions Does the Unconference model work? and interestingly, how can the unconference format be used with students in a classroom environment?

'I think it's really important to keep in mind that you can get students to do group work and sharing and talking together but giving them the option to move out and get on with their own work, that's really empowering and motivating, they might take snippets from the discussion and then say, yes this is what I need and get on with their own work. It's more about enabling them to learn the material in their own way.'

71 <http://oblinger.pbwiki.com/>

72 <http://blip.tv/file/get/LeighBlackall-ChristchurchCollegeOfEd272.flv>

73 <http://blip.tv/file/80183/>

On other occasions small groups would splinter off to work on a specific task. Sometimes individuals would take photographs or movies or interview onlookers or other guests about proceedings using cameras, PC media recording devices, or phones. Samples of this ad hoc on the fly content can be seen on the unconference blog.

OST suggests that these sessions should be preceded by a listing of all interested topics up on a wall or similar so participants can see at a glance what topics were being covered in that session, but there is no prescriptive way of going about this. This group of staff in NSW⁷⁴ approached the pre-discussion stage by encouraging staff to state whether they wanted to share, learn, or do something, and formed groups around that process.

There was recurrent comment on the empowering aspect of the unconference format for the classroom from many teachers and discussion on the types of physical open and closed spaces that could contribute to the success. This movie illustrates a potential classroom open space⁷⁵ that can facilitate group discussion or where individuals can just go off into a corner and get on with their own thing, separate to the group activity.

The Role of 'Experts'

FLNW had at its core a group of invited experts – some with an international profile – and their presence guaranteed a basic quorum of participants as these guests had pulling power. It also served as a bargaining chip when canvassing for funding for the event. Funding bodies, largely educational institutions, were more likely to fund an event that had significant profile due to the presence of international guests.

It was to be expected that at the start of the group sessions that it would be the work of these visiting guest experts that would serve as initial focal points for discussion. Although participants who turned up for the day's proceedings were invited to contribute to the initial spruikings on topics that interested them, few did. The presence of the invited experts no doubt made this a daunting task, but OST is emphatic that this opportunity be given to all participants. This would enable all participants, not just those with a recognised profile, to pitch for discussions on things that interested them.

Having visiting experts meant that discussion topics tended to be formulated around their interests. Though the group discussions were sufficiently fluid to allow for addressing topics brought to bear by participants, it would have been preferable that sessions/discussions were formed around the expressed interests of participants rather than the invited experts. Given that the collective expertise of the invited speakers was very broad, it was likely that they could have led, or contributed significantly to, sessions on any topics suggested by participants anyway.

The Role of Media: Personal and Group Publishing

The nature of the people invited to FLNW, and its focus on education a networked world, meant that there was a proliferation of personal and group media created and published - that is after all how networked

74 <http://blip.tv/file/106515/>

75 <http://blip.tv/file/103243/>

teachers and learners network - they publish. Every minute and every idea of every day was likely to be recorded, blogged, podcast, photographed or filmed and published to the web. It is not a criterion of OST, but for the unconference, with its origins in learning about technology via new approaches, it is a fair expectation that there be an electronic and public record.

"All conversations, whether to the entire room or one-to-one, unless otherwise stated, clearly and up front, are on the record and for attribution. You do not need to ask permission to quote something you hear at BloggerCon. Of course you may ask for permission to quote, and you may choose not to quote things you hear."⁷⁶

Many conferences publish proceedings after the event, but these are subject to a peer review process. But in an unconference, publishing is occurring virtually as it happens without any editorial process. As Stephen Downes remarked during the Christchurch session, this is one of the factors that distinguishes the old from the new world of learning. In the new world, any peer review or assessment of content happens after publishing, and the network(s) decide its value.

However, the constant documentation of FLNW meant that inevitably there would be a whole raft of material that was not of much value - out of focus photographs, blurred video, poor audio quality, half-baked ideas - all there in the public domain. Some FLNW participants consequently suggested that not all the media documenting the event be made public, and that some editorial discretion be used before it was published.

All professional development activities should be documented. In the spirit of an unconference this should be done as it happens. One could choose the path of BloggerCon and state upfront that all activity may be "on the record and for attribution." An alternative option may be to let participants know that if they don't want their image, voice, or ideas on the public record it is incumbent upon them to make that request at any given time, but it would seem impractical to have participants evaluate their input into an activity as it's happening and decide that they don't want it on the record. It would be unfortunate too if any hesitation about the value of one's contribution stymied one's input. Another core component of OST is that 'whoever comes are the right people' and by inference then, whatever is said is the right thing to say at the time. Part of working in a networked world is accepting that your input is part of the eventual and continually evolving body of knowledge, and that it will be adopted, modified, or discarded. It is not what you say (or how you look or sound in that blurred video) that is of primary importance - it is what the network does with the information you provided that matters more.

It is asking a lot of some people though to expect them to happily accept that their thoughts and actions go on record. Some people are private personalities; some require time to assimilate ideas before they can respond eloquently. As the participant on the video at an unconference PD event inspired by FLNW says, "It's all about getting used to being visible."⁷⁷

Relevance for You and Your Organisation

Imagine that you arrive at a one or two day conference and there is no set agenda or program. I posed this question to a group of TAFE staff at a staff development session soon after I returned from FLNW and the response from the approximately 20 people present was overwhelmingly positive. One person did comment

⁷⁶ Dave Winer; BloggerCon for Newbies <http://www.bloggercon.org/III/newbies>

⁷⁷ <http://blip.tv/file/105732/>

that they would feel cheated, but others thought 'it would be fantastic.'

If you take this approach the first hour or so of the day is taken up with a collaborative discussion designed to formulate the days program. The FLNW model showed that a more open approach to professional development can work. Professional Development events, even those of one to three days duration, do not need need invited experts or guest facilitators.

Participants knowing in advance that they are coming to address an advertised topic, or perhaps to solve a recognised problem, and knowing too that is the reason that people will come - not listen to experts or speakers on a pre-arranged agenda – is a strength based approach to professional development⁷⁸ that promotes greater buy-in and commitment. Knowing that the success of the FLNW event would rest on the input of all of us, a group of FLNW participants spent the day before it got underway in engaged and prolonged discussion: "The learning and discussion on the future of learning had begun in earnest without a single presentation!"⁷⁹ Such is the power of inviting people to attend an event and letting them know they will have significant input into the structure and outcome of the event, as it will build on what they know and bring to the table, and not what others deem they should know.

Workers for the Knowledge Era

If our educational institutions are to train their teachers to function effectively in the knowledge era, they need to offer training that reflects this new learning. Work in the Knowledge Era is characterised by

"...processes and structures that are more emergent than predictable

* ...tacit knowledge, which can only be shared through relationship, conversation, and interaction."

* Networks: who and how you know is as important as what you know."⁸⁰

A knowledge worker needs to know how to collaborate.

The unconference with its open space approach to professional development is a model more likely to foster the kinds of skills and attitudes suitable for the knowledge era than the deficit model that may have outlived its usefulness as the primary means of staff development. The unconference allows for group commitment to a process that is negotiated in non-hierarchical networked entities. It allows the opportunity to become familiar with the unpredictable and emergent through negotiating content as it evolves. It validates, and capitalises on, the knowledge that everyone brings to the event and assumes that the collective expertise of the rank and file is as valuable as the knowledge and opinions of experts or those in authority.

78 <http://oblinger.pbwiki.com/>

79 Dave Winer; BloggerCon for Newbies

80 Maret Staron, Robby Weatherley and Marie Jasinski; Life based learning – a new framework for capability development in vocational education and training (VET) - http://www.icvet.tafensw.edu.au/ezone/year_2006/jul_aug/research_lifebased_learning.htm

Footnotes

1. Dave Winer; What is an Unconference? - <http://scripting.wordpress.com/2006/03/05/what-is-an-unconference>
2. Harrison Owen; Opening Space for Emerging order - http://www.openspaceworld.com/brief_history.htm
3. Diana and James Oblinger; Is It Age or It: First Steps Toward Understanding the Net Generation - <http://oblinger.pbwiki.com/>
4. Dave Winer; BloggerCon for Newbies - <http://www.bloggercon.org/III/newbies>
5. Maret Staron, Robby Weatherley and Marie Jasinski; Life based learning – a new framework for capability development in vocational education and training (VET) - http://www.icvet.tafensw.edu.au/ezone/year_2006/jul_aug/research_lifebased_learning.htm
6. Michael Coghlan; Day 2 FLNW (P53)
7. Shen Zhang, Yvonne Wood, Steven Parker 'FLNW#10 - The FLNW Unconference format' <http://blip.tv/file/80183/>
8. 'FLNW06 - Professional Development Space of the Future' <http://blip.tv/file/103243/>

Thriftiness is a virtue - in learning and education, as well – Teemu Leinonen

<http://flosse.dicole.org/?item=thriftiness-is-a-virtue-in-learning-and-education-as-well>



http://flickr.com/photos/stephen_downes/277189201/

I started to write this post as a comment to Leigh Blackall's post "learning should be free, its an education that can cost". Then it started to expand. Read Leigh's nice post first, then this will then make more sense.

The difference between a library and a university/college/school is still hardly understood among the people in the e-learning field. The Open Courseware and the Libre Resource movement (if there is such thing some day) is actually leading us back to the separation of learning content and activities and I think that is putting us back on track. The library is a critical service of any University. One could claim it to be the heart – actually more the liver - of a University. Still the University is more a community of practice than a place.

I agree that learning must be free for the people. We should see this as an investment that pays off. Naturally, content (libraries) and education (institutions) cost money. So, who should pay this?

In Finland both, libraries (public and scientific) and Universities are free and open for all - meaning there are no fees and you are free to visit and use the libraries. The legislation also guarantees a right for the people to attend lectures held at any of the Universities. So, you can just walk in and take a seat, take notes, even ask questions of the lecturer. Laboratories, workshops, hospitals etc. may block you by making an appeal to security, lack of space etc. This is reasonable.

What you (a person off the street) *can not do* is ask the lecturer to read and give feedback to your essay, or ask her to supervise your research etc. To do this you must be accepted to one of the study programs. This is because these tasks require use of lecturer's limited resources of time. But, why is there freedom for all to attend the lectures?

The reason is money. We are a poor country (or at least use to be) with only 5 million people. We can not afford loosing a single Joe or Leigh who are willing to learn. These people sitting in the back of the lecture room do not cost anything to anyone - the lecture would be held anyway, and in 9 out of 10 lectures there are more seats in the room than attendants. They still scale pretty well.

This is the same with content in libraries, or even more with content on the Internet. They scale even better

than the lecture rooms. When content is produced and located in the library or on the Internet it costs some money – less and less nowadays. But reading (using) the content costs very little more. The main reason is that information and knowledge does not wear down. Also when you give it away you do not lose it. It's a strange type of goods.

So, anyway, as there are costs who will pay them? Joe the Taxpayer pays it all. To make prospects greater that Joe will have a business or a job, it makes sense to give him all the possible ways to learn. Learning relates to productiveness. Productiveness means ability to pay taxes.

The whole idea behind the free or libre learning is thriftiness. We can not afford to lose people who are interested to learn: whether they do it inside the formal system or informally with content from libraries / Internet and in online discussions with their peers, does not matter. These are the people who come up with new ideas, start businesses and finally, one day, pay taxes.

Comments on Thriftiness is a virtue - in learning and education, as well

leigh blackall wrote:

My goodness! This is great! Thanks for describing this Teemu. Is it policy in Finland to keep the unis and libraries open, or is simply accepted practice?

Tleinnone wrote:

It's a policy.

allan wrote:

The Internet is becoming an open source library, especially for the young.

All that is left to be opened is the class room.

For some they can pursue knowledge on their own, others need structure to attain it.

As more of the self taught and self motivated involve themselves with networking, traditional schools and their certifications should become less important.

What will be important is a reputation for integrity, action, creativity, and applied knowledge.

The Maori Princess – Stephen Downes

<http://halfanhour.blogspot.com/2006/10/maori-princess.html>

Tears still came to my eyes on the flight home, of course. They do that; the emotions well up from nowhere, and with them, the sadness, the hollowness. But today, on the flight home, it didn't feel the same. It was all right, and when the tears came and went I felt not sadness but something different. Happiness, even.

I think what surprised me most about our travelling unconference was the emotion it caused, not just in me but in all of the participants. Was anyone untouched? Teemu, maybe. But for the rest of us, it seemed pretty evident. We each wrestled with our own ghosts or demons or whatever.



<http://flickr.com/photos/teachandlearn/248636021/>

Last night (last night? It was actually three days ago but a half-world flight, date line and lifetime have intervened to create this mirage) as we sat in a nameless tavern in the darkened and empty north side of Wellington a Maori woman came to me, straightened my collar, pulled loose some hair from under my jacket, complimented it and combed it with her fingers.

"Gisborne," she said (it came out "Gisbon" to me). "East side." She was the daughter of a Maori king there, she said, but also that it didn't matter. What mattered were her religion and her gangs. And I said later, I don't know what she did, but she made me feel more beautiful than I have felt in a long time. And we sat and spoke with the Maori princess, and as she left, she hugged me, whispered some words in my ear, and disappeared into the night.

It was the Friday. It was the day we started in the Te Papa Tongarewa, the group of us, watched a parade, and then toured the city as, one by one, the members caught their flights. It was the day we three drove up the west coast of the North Island, watched the sun set over the Cook Strait, and finished with a surprisingly good supper, our conversation the compass that we explorers maybe needed to find our way.

It was one of those days. You know, one of those days when the world shelters you in its arms and finds somehow some strength to pass along to you, some goodwill you never thought it would ever grant you, some peace and contentment where you felt there would never be any. "I told you the Maori would greet me in their own way," I said later.

And they had; and I think their ancestors must have had unfinished business with one of my friends, first, before they could come to speak with me, and as the Maori princess hugged me, I thanked them for that.

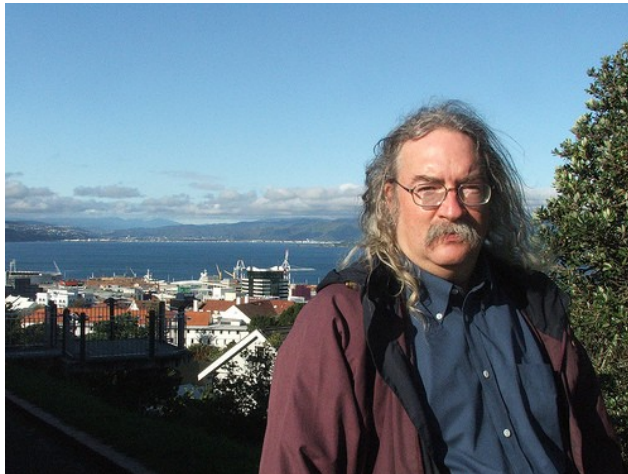
We all have our demons, I think. Mine is the sadness and the loneliness felt by the little boy as he sees his closest friends betray him, the fear as he sees the group turn on him and fall upon him, the shame of running away and hiding, the knowledge that if anyone really knew, they would do the same.

That day, I realized, they wouldn't.

The next day I felt happy, a genuine happiness. I would be OK, and my friend would be OK (and I know that, with a certainty). And I found an old wooden tiki (from the 1930s, the shopkeeper said) in an antique store window, and for a ridiculously low price placed the icon in my jacket pocket. Throughout the flight home I would grip the icon with my hand, and I would know.

The tears still come and go, the emotions still sway with the wind, and even as I write this I feel old familiar voices questioning what I can feel and what I can say. But right now, none of this has any effect. Right now, as I look outside the airplane window and see the familiar hills of New Brunswick slide by, their slopes reddened by the fall foliage, I feel not sadness nor despair but a quietude and peace I have not felt in a very long time.

Kia ora. Thank you.



http://flickr.com/photos/stephen_downes/279000990/

Photos



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